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MY BEST PUPIL.

BY

M. A. CURTOIS.

I've heard of heart's unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.

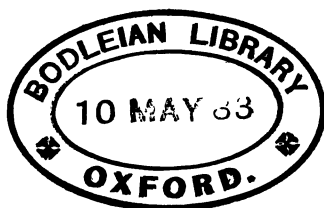
Therefore I say unto you : if thine adversary hunger feed him ;
if he thirst give him drink ; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals
of fire on his head.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
NEW BOND STREET, W.

1883.

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251. k. 454.



P R E F A C E .

I WRITE this story for Jeanie.

During the long afternoons whilst I sit alone by the fire, after Jeanie has put the pillow behind my back and set the footstool for my feet, and given me my draught, with a scrap of orange peel after it to keep it from tasting, and kissed me and gone to her work, and I sit idle with the clock ticking near, and the snow maybe falling outside, thinking and dozing, and wondering over the limbs that move so slowly now, as if the life and strength that once were in them had just been dropped, and might yet return again—though they will not return—a thought does come to me which I should like yet to fulfil in such manner as I can. It is a bit of a promise I have made to myself, and I dare not wait much longer, lest if I delay

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to write my brain should refuse to form the words or my hand to hold the pen.

Jeanie, you asked me once to tell you of my life, and I told you that I could not. That seemed folly—a sick man's whim of silence when a few words might have done for answer. But it was true then, and it is true now. Not that, thank God, there is any part of my life I should be quite afraid to write; I think I am happier than others in that. But you seem young and fresh, and the years have been so long to me. I should like you to think that hopes are always granted soon—they are to some people—and that London streets are very far away from here. They were close to me once on a time, and that for a very long while before you found me there.

Now, as I sit by the fire, half-dozing, with the pillow behind me, the oddest scenes will come before me all at once. I suppose I get dreaming; it is so quiet. Now it is a bit of a bridge, with the sun, maybe, on the water, or an old woman with a scrunched up face and a pack behind her back; or the cur that bit my heels when I was looking in the gutter for scraps. These things come and go till it is quite strange to have fire and food so near

me. I think my memory gets weaker, for it is a good four years now since you found me, but far-off things have been coming close since that last illness of mine.

And so, before it goes quite, there is one thing I want to write. It is a story that happened years ago, at a time when things were very bad for me. I was very heart-sick then. I think it was even better for me in my London days, when I seemed to have got past hunger into the time when one does not care to eat, and when I dropped in the snow, and felt as if I were happier there than in a workhouse, because I had been so long in the streets that it was pleasanter to die at home. You saved me from that.

And someone else saved me long ago. Jeanie, never doubt God, and always believe that down in every man is the something that can be loved. I should like to leave that as my last lesson, the old man's lesson, for you. And if you want to know how I learnt these things myself, just turn your eyes to that picture that hangs opposite my bed on the wall. I think I should like that to be the thing on which my eyes rest when it has come near the end with me, and I am close to that next world

which is always connected in my mind with a young face I used to know.

It is some sort of gratitude, acknowledged now at last, that forces me to write, and I can dare to tell these things to you because you will care for what I say for the sake of my love for you.

JOHN MASON.

10, Victoria Terrace,

Dec. 5th, 18—.

MY BEST PUPIL.

CHAPTER I.

It was in November in the year —. But let me first tell you where I was living then.

The town of L— is a large and rich town. It has manufacturers and rich tradesmen, and there are great houses where gentlemen live. I suppose if you went to look at it you would only see the squares and the gardens. But there are parts of it that are neither large nor rich ; you know that every town has its back streets. If you come towards this one on the east side, and if you take the path instead of the road, you will find a dull, sluggish river, with a little path going along by the side of it. There is the railway on the other side, and the canal beyond. It is a long way from the beginning of the path to the town, and it is longer than it looks be-

cause the path is so straight. And such a mist rises out of the river sometimes that you cannot see the town even when you are close to it; I have seen figures on the other side of the canal, though that is very near, look quite gray and indistinct as they walked on through the twilight. But if you go on far enough you come to a great bridge that spans the river, and then you know you have reached the town at last. On a fine day in the morning it is pleasant to stand under that bridge and look down along the dull, green water with the sunlight striking down green light into it, and all the old, tottering houses and the posts by the water's edge so still against it, and so clear beneath, that you can hardly tell where the reflection begins. Then you can look along under the other distant bridges too, and see their shadows on the water, and the light on the water before and beyond them, and the great bridge at the end, and the tall houses where the High Street crosses the river. But this part, with the little bridges of which I speak, has nothing to do with the High Street; it is a dull

back portion of the town, grimy on one side with the tall, black backs of manufactories, old on the other with the falling houses that come down to the water's side. I used to live just beyond the foundry with an old house just opposite me that came right into the river, which, when it was high, used almost to wash into the lowest windows through the broken panes.

Behind the foundry—there is but one here, but it has many buildings—is only the little path, black here, and a wooden rail to separate it from the river. Down this from both sides—that is, from town and country—come the workmen in the morning, some having tramped for miles before the sun rose, that they might get to their work in time. And at mid-day you may see numbers of them sitting along here with their backs to the wall, and their bits of cans or loaves by their sides. And then, just before work time, comes a rush and a tramping, and all the men come back whose homes are near, some with washed faces and some not, for there is a difference between them as to that. Then

the great foundry shuts them in, and the path is quiet. I used to know the time by the noise of them when I heard them under my windows.

My windows were just beyond the foundry. I had three of them—a bedroom and two schoolrooms, one of which served me for sitting-room as well. They were very large rooms these two, and had once belonged, I think, to a gentleman's house before this part of the town was built. Below were three shops, and above lived my grimy landlady, her daughter, and three lodgers whose footsteps were never able to walk steadily to bed. I could hear them stumbling about above whilst I lay trying to sleep at night. That concerned me very little; I did not think much of my fellow-creatures then.

I was then just forty-two—an age at which a man has begun to turn a corner, and to understand a little of the shadier half of life. And I had seen reverses in my time. My father was a gentleman, as you know, and had died bankrupt after a speculation that would have brought the law on him if he had

lived long enough for that. I still hope and believe—as indeed he told me—that he did not, after all, know much of the affair; greater scoundrels than he had the management of it: that is my comfort now, but then I could find small comfort anywhere. I was twenty, had been brought up to great expectations, to be idle and extravagant, and to think that no sort of shame could ever come near my name and me. But I was not quite at ease neither, for I had just had another mishap that burns and stings a little even when I write of it now. When I was sixteen I had fallen in love with my cousin. She was a very pretty girl; I had these expectations, as I have said, and she engaged herself to me without difficulty. But I had also a great friend; I had rather not write his name even now. I trusted and honoured him more than I can tell you. He kept me from wrong during those years when I was young. But he was not in all things honest by me. It is an old story; I have heard it of other people besides myself. I fell ill; they fell in love with each other. I was such

a poor fool, so rough and hard even then, that I used to be glad to think that he should speak to her. When I got well they told me nothing, but continued their love and friendship to me as before. Then all at once I heard that they were married. I have never seen either of them since. A few days after came my father's ruin, for which I had not been prepared, and then his death. You may fancy that I was overwhelmed.

Jeanie, you have heard this story, or part of it, before, and you have heard people say, too, how hard and proud I was then, when many wanted to help me. But I don't think I could quite help that, though I daresay my manner was wrong. I did not want to be pitied; I wanted to set my teeth and work my way through it all. I did not feel as if I deserved help since my father had been wrong. And I wanted so much to work hard and pay off all his debts myself. I was young and strong, I believed I had a *wonderful* talent, and I wanted to get away from all these people who had known me and my disgrace before. So I left my home, and never

from that day have I seen it, or any of my old friends and relations again. God bless them! I was too proud and ungrateful to know it, but they did try to help me then, and I think of that now.

So I began my life as an artist. Jeanie, I daresay you have read in books of the good boys who have no money, who begin by running errands and such like, and end by saving, growing rich, turning country gentlemen, or paying off all their fathers' debts. Those are such pretty stories. And I won't say too that there are not such things in life, only what I say is that life would be too easy to understand if such things were common. I reckon there are a great many good boys whose histories might not be quite so pleasant to hear. The books don't tell us of those, and that is a good thing, for we don't want books to make us sad. Well, it is not for me to talk, now that your generosity is granting part, at any rate, of my wish at last. Perhaps the whole will be granted before I die. I thank you—and I have learned at last to thank God that I

cannot say, as I wished to say when I was young, "It is my own hand that has done it."

Yet hear my story for a little. I was twenty, as I have said, when I began to work—with great hopes then. And at the first everything went well with me. Perhaps there was a mercy in that to keep me from despairing whilst I was young. Though I was not much known in the town where I settled, I yet found a friend—a gentleman who admired my water-colours, and bought them, and let me teach his sons, besides getting me a few other pupils as well. I don't think he could have known much of art. I had the sense, with the money I thus gained, to get myself drawing lessons, and every spare moment I spent in perspective or drawing from the life. So after a time I began to improve—indeed I always had a quick eye for form, and found no difficulty in correctness as to that, though truthful colouring was harder to me. I worked with all my might, and was glad. Yet it was a hard life; I had no rest day or night save the little while I spent in bed, and

I lived mostly on oatmeal for the sake of economy, and allowed myself no pleasures at all.

Well, the first two years passed, and I had contrived to save money. Then the gentleman who had been kind to me left the town—he had got rather tired of me before that—my pupils dropped off, my drawings were sold no longer, and I found myself without any source of income at all. Yet I had my store of money, though it went to my heart to touch that. I felt as if I should almost go mad if I had no more lessons—I had begun to find that even *my* fame must be built on foundations, so I determined to keep on with them at all hazards. By the end of the year my store was gone, but by that time things had begun to look up again with me. Some drawings of mine—really vigorous these were—had won great notice at one of the exhibitions in the town; I began to be considered a rising genius. I found, too, that by moving to a neighbouring town I should get some pupils. I went there, and seemed to drop into ease and plenty at once.

Then I was so wild with joy, so afraid, too, after what had happened to me, that I dared not lose a moment of the time thus granted to me. For one whole year I allowed hand and brain as little rest as might be, gained pupils, painted pictures, saved money, then fell ill, and for several months could not work at all. When I recovered my position was not as good as it had been ; I could not get on well ; then a fit of desperate vanity took me to London, where I could not get on at all. I returned to my friendly town to find that all prospect of success there was gone. Well, I need not tell you it all.

You can understand now how things went up and down with me. I did my best, and I had only myself to keep, yet I had to struggle hard to preserve my courage sometimes. Still I worked and saved every penny I could. When I was thirty, after ten years' labour, I had really some money. But then a strange change came to me. Up to that time I had always believed in myself, and the hope of paying my father's debts seemed made certain by that other hope of becoming

a great artist and astonishing the world. But now it was different. The change seemed to come all at once. I began to doubt and question, to ask myself whether I could really improve so much after all. I knew my faults by this time; I began to be afraid that I knew my limits too. Before, when I painted a picture of any size, I always felt certain that it would be better in spirit than the last; now I was not quite so sure. I began to fear that, some technical points excepted, I had done my best already. That fear was a terror; it was with me night and day, and goaded me to a kind of desperation. I wanted to prove myself to myself. In the next few years I did more than I had ever done before, sold a good many pictures, and got a few into the Royal Academy at last. But still the fear was with me, and, besides, I was overworking myself terribly. My right hand, whose closed fist had always seemed like a sledge-hammer, began to tremble so much that I could scarcely paint. And still I kept on painting. At last one day my foot slipped when I was

coming downstairs ; I had a bad fall, and wrenched my hand in trying to save myself. That only served, I think, to confirm mischief that had already been begun, but it did confirm it. I hurt my head badly, and had fever ; when I recovered from that I found that my hand was almost useless. They told me I would never be able to paint with it again. I took it all very quietly in a manner, but when they had gone I went up to my painting-room and broke all my brushes. That was a foolish thing to do, but I was half mad that day.

Still I had to live, and still I had the wish to try to pay my father's debts, for I would not break my promise to myself. So I resigned myself to being a teacher. Jeanie, you do not know what a bitter thing it is to teach that to others in which you once hoped yourself to excel. There were times when I could scarcely bear it. But I was too old to learn another profession, so I did my best. I could not get on well. Those who knew me, knew that I taught with all my might ; but my manners did not please the gentle-

folks ; I was too rough for them ; others, not born gentlemen like themselves, could suit them more. I was glad of that ; I wanted, as I want now, to be one of the people ; yet I remembered, too, that I had been educated, and was sorry sometimes to be thought as rough as I seemed. Then the poor, too, thought me proud, and I could make friends nowhere. Still I worked on ; when I could not get rich pupils I got poor ones, and did the best I could. Then all at once a flourishing bank in which I had a share or two came to a standstill, and I found myself liable for the failings of others. All my savings went then ; I became heavily in debt, and knew that, for many years at least, I must give up thinking of my father's difficulties and consider only my own. That seemed the last straw. Still I worked on, getting more and more down in the world till sometimes I felt almost desperate. Once I wrote to some of my relations, but they had long ago forgotten that they had wished to help me, and were afraid of me and my poverty besides. That was natural, only it hurt me that I

should have written to them, though I had only asked for work. From that time I determined to fight my own battles always alone; and so the years went on till a long time had passed.

At last I came to L—, and found a sort of resting-place there. If I shut my eyes I can see the place now—the old town, the houses nodding over the river, the white lines of clothes hung out on the grimy rails by the river's side to dry—I can hear the tramp of the foundrymen going to their work, or the rush of my boys as they come up the stairs to me. Or it is evening, the gas has been lighted, and my boys are all at work in one of the big rooms, whilst some baskets and pans arranged in the middle make a study of perspective for them. Or it is almost night, and I am sitting alone by the fire in the great solitary room with my one comfort and companion by my side. I will tell you of that companion afterwards.

There were pleasant things after all in that life at L—, but I did not think much of them then; it was a grim sort of life to me. I was

forty-two, already almost old and infirm, without friends, without hope, without pleasure in my past or faith in my future, without trust or love for man or God, with very little that could make my life even seem bearable to me. One by one my hopes had gone. Yet I worked on still, because there was nothing else to be done, and it seemed natural to me. And I thought that I should go on always like this—always alone—working, eating, sleeping, as long as my hands could move or my brain labour, until the time came when I should have to give up and sink into that other darkness that seemed only a little darker than my state of existence then.

It was at this time that my story begins.

* * * * *

On the 7th November, 18— (I can tell the date by my account book, for I bought a new pair of boots on that day), I and my class were working together as usual. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, the gas had long been lighted, and the old blue check curtains drawn across the windows, for a grey mist rising from the river had made the

evening almost as dark as night. The boys—a few tradesmen's sons, and a number of lads whose fathers worked in the foundry close by—were all hard at work, and in all corners of the room, scarcely attempting to speak, or even to whisper, for I never allowed conversation when I was present. I had been going my rounds, taking each honestly in turn, and had stopped at last before one of the slowest in the class, the son of a shoemaker, whose father had a great idea that his boy should turn out an artist. I could have told him there was small chance of that; still I did my best by the lad, an honest, harmless creature, who followed my instructions with painful care, and could never understand why such curious results would follow.

I was trying to improve his eye now by setting him to copy outline drawings of pillars, leaves, and stems, arranged to form straight lines and curves for the benefit of beginners. Now, as he sat at his old easel, and I leant over his shoulder and saw the bungle he had made, I took the chalk from

his fingers—I could use my right hand a little now—and made a mark in every place where I saw his performance was wrong. Then, to help him by pointing out more clearly his greatest error, I made a tiny curve at the corner of his paper. It grew under my hand—I cannot think why or how, for I was not given to such fancies—and became a monkey's head. Then—for I was unable to help completing it—it still kept on growing—twinkling eyes, little hands clasping a stick, a long tail curving out behind. I had just finished the last twist of that when I heard behind me a deep-drawn breath or sigh of pleasure. I turned sharply enough, thinking that one of my class had got up from his seat to stand at my elbow. But it was not so; I had never before seen the boy on whom my eyes fell, the queerest sight those eyes had ever yet beheld.

He seemed about fourteen or fifteen—a tall, slight lad in very ragged clothes, and with such large holes in boots and socks that his feet could be seen through without difficulty. His hands—on which my surprised

glance fell first, and the like of which I have never seen since—were thin, supple, delicate like a girl's, and so wasted as to be almost transparent. Nervous, sensitive hands these were, but the face above—though that was strange too—had about it a look more common to back streets and gutters, tangled black hair, an overhanging forehead, and eyes shining with sullen, defiant black fire beneath.

He stood there glowering at me as if I had injured him, whilst a sudden stop of all work, and a little unfavourable murmur all round the class, showed that his appearance at least was not entirely unknown to them. I may add, to account for his unexpected appearance, that only an old red curtain separated the class-room from the stairs; that being so, I never expected knocks.

“Who are you?” said I, “and where do you come from?”

“I’ve come to draw,” he answered, short surly, as if he were giving his orders to me.

“My class is full,” I said, as shortly myself.

He made no reply.

I saw then for the first time a bundle of what looked like water-colours under his arm.

“Have you any particular reason for wishing to come here?” I asked.

“Don’t know where else to go,” he said, still glowering at me at intervals, as if he were afraid I should attack him.

The class sat silent and astonished.

“Very well,” I replied, after a pause, “we will speak about that. But I can’t have you wasting my time here now; you can wait for me if you like. Do you see that door? Go through that, and through again into my painting-room if you care to stay for me, and I will come to you as soon as I can. Do you hear?”

He still waited a moment, glaring suspiciously at me, whilst his feet shuffled on the ground, then turned and went as I had said.

As he closed the door after him, a long, low murmur, a subdued hiss, ran round the class, and quick whispers followed. I waited

till I heard the other door open before I turned to them.

“Will you please be quiet?” I said then.

They subsided into silence, and I went on my rounds again.

About a quarter of an hour afterwards I was standing by Ralph the Rover, as he was called—a poor orphan errand boy, without father, mother, or relations, but the general pet and favourite of the neighbourhood notwithstanding. The Curate was giving him his drawing lessons. I stooped to correct his work—he was doing some mechanical drawing that day—and took that opportunity to whisper in his ear. The rest were already putting away their things; it was a Saturday, and we closed early. Ralph had looked up eagerly as I came to him. He had pale blue eyes, cheeks rather sunken from work and hunger, and a great mark on his forehead that a drunken woman had made by throwing a pot of beer at him, but he was not a bad-looking fellow for all that.

“Rover,” said I, as I put the finishing touch, “who *was* that?”

“*That?*” Ralph looked up with a twinkle, but he knew at once whom I meant. “What, don’t you know, sir?”

“No.”

“*That*—was the young Arce.”

“*What?*” I cried.

“Arcet, sir—A-r-c-e-t, but we gen’rally forgets the last letter.”

“If you please, sir”—the next boy had overheard—“he ain’t fit to be in any class at all, that chap ain’t.”

“Oh, that’s your opinion, is it?” said I, for I knew my friend to be the son of a jeweller, and conceited of his parentage. But the class had looked up in approval. I paid no attention to them, put the last touch with my left hand to Rover’s drawing as I leant over his shoulder, and then went out. But as I walked through my great solitary sitting-room I could not help wondering over the strange impression the new-comer had made upon me. I could not account for it, for after all I had seen something like such wild eyes before—amongst the lowest ragamuffins of my acquaintance—and such

hands, too, amongst the consumptive, only not quite the same; I could not explain the difference then.

The boy was standing alone in my little painting-room before a heap of works. My first glance made me annoyed with myself for the interest I had felt in him—a sallow, sickly, ill-conditioned lad I called him inwardly. But then I saw that he had pulled out from the heap—which he had no business to do—a little charcoal drawing of mine, and was considering it attentively. It was an unpretending bit of a thing—a rough sketch of a wall with ivy on it, but there was good work in it too. Only there were big and bright paintings near, and he had chosen this, and it had not even my initials on it for him to know that it was mine. I felt my heart grow softer to him at once, and that made my manner, I believe, more surly than ever.

“Here—you,” said I, “what do you mean by touching? Come and stand out and let me look at you. What is your name?”

I have been told that my voice could get

very hard and grating in those days sometimes. I suppose it must have done so then, for I saw a sort of quirk go through him, lips, shoulders, feet—he had clumsy feet, by the way—before he gathered himself sulkily together to hear what I had to say. For one instant he had looked up, and I had seen once more the black, evil gleam in his eyes. Then he stood before me shuffling his feet and looking on the ground, without replying to my question.

“What is your name?” I asked again.

“Dalton.”

“*What?*” I cried, for the second time that evening.

“Dalton,” he replied, with sulky firmness, pressing his lips together when he had spoken.

“Oh! Anything else?”

He looked up at me in a half-frightened manner, whilst a dull, slow flush rose in his face. Then he spoke, very slowly, as if each word had some painful association, and were being forced out of him by the torture.

“Andrew—Arcet—Dalton.”

“Oh, very well,” said I, puzzled, for I could not understand his manner. “And where do you live?”

He waited, seeming to think whether he should answer or not.

“Pleasant Place.”

“Pleasant?” said I, “that’s a nice name. And is it a pleasant place?”

“No.”

He did not pause this time, and spoke with trebled emphasis. I was almost startled by him, but I recovered myself after a moment.

“Ah, well,” said I, “let’s have a look at these drawings of yours.”

And he gave them into my hands, his lips twitching all over as if he were going to be hanged.

I have some of those works now, and when you see them you will not wonder at the wonder I felt then. Such drawings! so incorrect, so graceful, so grotesque, such a wealth of fancy, and such a wilderness of errors. Fairies dancing by moonlight, crooked faces peeping under gnarled boughs, old women leaning on crutches, bits of rivers

with the sunlight on them, roofs of houses with goblins dancing on the tops, and one quite large picture of two men stabbing each other under the stars. Morbid fancies were here, crude drawing, incorrect colouring, scarcely a line right or a shade true, yet withal a curious sense of power such as I had never, in all my dealings with pupils, experienced before.

I stood and stared.

"Hum," said I at last, "a great many faults here. I should say from these you had never been taught, eh?"

His lips quirked again, and he made no reply.

"Have you been taught? Do you hear?"

"No."

"Ah! I thought as much. Now, here's a river, very charming, but I should think you were looking at a brick wall whilst you were doing of it. That won't do, you know. It might be all very well, boy, for a great artist to produce a river out of his own head—best not even for him—but for those who are at the other end of the stick the result ain't

quite so beautiful, do you see? Now you've been trying to paint before you know how to draw, and if you were to come to me the first thing I would set you to would be straight lines and outlines for a long while to come, so that you mightn't handle a brush till you knew how to use a pencil—do you see? And, if you're wise, give up that foolish trick of making things out of your head till you know how to set about it; schoolgirls do it, but a man who means to be an artist ought to have more sense than that. By the way, how old are you?"

He had been standing listening to me, shuffling his feet, whilst his lips twitched and his eyes seemed to burn like light under his forehead. It took him some while to come back to himself sufficiently to answer my question.

"Goin'er fifteen."

"Ah—and that means fifteen in"—

"March."

"March—very well—now my classes are full already, but I don't mind taking an extra boy in sometimes. You could come in the

afternoons. But I require to be paid beforehand"—for sad experience had taught me that lesson—"and I doubt you've not much money."

Once more the dull flush came over his face, as I knew it would. He fumbled in his pockets; after a while he produced a four-penny bit and a half-penny.

"That's not enough," said I.

There was no answer.

"You see," said I, "you can't pay me now, and if not now, will you be likely to pay me after a few months are over, when I have had all the annoyance of teaching you as well?"

Still there was no reply.

"Do you want very much to come—speak?"

A hard struggle with his pride, then he muttered with his eyes on the ground—

"I did wanter."

"Ah! well," said I, hesitating a little, "come Monday morning then, and I will give you my answer. But I can't give you much hope, you know. And now be off with you."

Take those affairs of yours, I don't want them, I know what you can't do now and that's quite enough for me."

He took them and went, and I threw myself into the nearest chair and thought.

CHAPTER II.

My thoughts led me to call in a visitor that evening, a very rare thing with me.

Perhaps a hermit in his cell could hardly enjoy more solitary evenings than I did then. When I shut myself and my one silent companion into my sitting-room after the boys had gone, I knew always that from that hour I would see no one till the night was over. My fellow lodgers upstairs had companions, witness the stamping and singing that sometimes only ended with the morning; my landlady had children who came to see her, and visitors as well, the maid had sweethearts—I lived alone.

At first I liked this and only regretted the wasted hours, for I had found night-classes more than my health, for the time being at least, was able to stand; it seemed impossible that any human companionship could be pleasant to me, and yet perhaps I should not

have loved my one consolation so well if I had not been lonely at whiles. The solitary hours were pleasant in their way, I had plenty to occupy my spare moments, dusting, settling, yes, and even sewing, for I had become a notable housewife for economy's sake, and liked to have things neat and clean about me. When I was not engaged in such-like domestic occupations, I would sit in my big chair by the hearth and do nothing, for I would not study.

In early days, when many thought me a rising artist, several of my professional brothers tried to make friends with me. But I had vowed never to have a friend again. Now in my older age, lonely and discontented, I was less likely to have a companion—my big face and sledge-hammer arms seemed to frighten people, besides I did not care for the society of the profligate and the good thought me a heathen. Yet now, even now, there were those, good and bad, who occasionally tried to force a slight acquaintance on me. And sometimes, by reason of loneliness, I submitted a little to their advances.

Amongst the very lowest of these was the man I had summoned to see me that evening.

He was called the Ranter, and it was popularly supposed that he had at one time been given to delivering discourses, of what nature I know not. I only hope he had never disgraced any sort of religion by preaching. He was a fellow of between fifty and sixty, small, wiry, with wiry black hair cut very short and that stood up straight on his head, small beery eyes, and a complexion that might have rivalled red-hot coals for liveliness. Yet though he was, I should say, never sober, he was never stupid or confused either, and by keen wits exercised on a multitude of small affairs contrived to get enough money to pay his way along. For one thing, he used to sing songs of the vilest nature at the lowest sort of public-houses, and though he had long lost whatever voice he might have had, that did not seem to be a disadvantage there. He was a drunken, ill-conducted old man, but he was sharp-witted, good-natured and rather a favourite in the quarter where he and I lived. And he never had any

scruples about making advances to everybody. Now and then he used to come into my room, not that I wanted him there or ever gave him anything to eat or drink, but that I sometimes tolerated him, and he liked my fire, for the poor wretch felt the cold, and had none of his own. I once lent him a blanket through a sharp winter, and he still remembered that with a sort of gratitude, and would bring me stories of all the people in the neighbourhood. Very marvellous were some of these, but strange to say not without truth, for he would tell what he supposed to be the truth to me though he could lie fast enough to others. I used to sit in my chair and listen or not, according as I felt inclined.

Amongst the high society in which he moved, he boasted much of his great friendship with me—I knew that, but had not pride enough left to care.

The Ranter knew everything, and everybody in the neighbourhood, had a quick, quiet tongue, and was to be relied upon, therefore he was the best man in the world for me to consult concerning the previous history of a

possibly undesirable pupil. It was for that reason I had sent for him. Never had I taken so much trouble on such a subject before, but something about my boy-visitor, with his nervous, almost insane eyes, had interested and baffled me. I could not help suspecting that the dislike of all the rest of my class had rather more foundation to rest its facts upon than usual. So I sent for the Ranter.

And now, Jeanie, imagine us together, I in my wooden chair, the Ranter on his three-legged stool, between us the saucepan in which his beer is heating. The tallow candle has not been lighted ; I had learnt, like the great miser, that conversation does not require that extravagance, and besides, the fire gives light enough. Against the wall by the mantelpiece, to the left hand of the Ranter, is a form on which his bit of bread and meat and a tumbler are waiting till the beer is heated to his taste. My own bread and cheese, with a little beer, wait for me in my painting room ; but I prefer always to eat and drink alone.

The firelight shone on the red face and wiry hair of the Ranter. He was telling me a story of how he used to wheel potatoes in a barrow about the country, and how "these 'ere potatoes got me recommended at court," a history to which I paid very slight heed indeed. I forgot to say that he would still tell lies where his own life was concerned, though he knew I did not believe him, the habit of romancing was too strong for him there. I leant back in my chair, rested my stiff, aching bones, and thought. After awhile the beer became hot enough, the Ranter carefully poured out half from the saucepan into the tumbler, separated the bread and meat with his dirty fingers into two unequal portions, ate and drank and put the rest away. He was a gourmand in his own fashion, and always took his meal after this manner in two divisions, leaving the larger half for the last. Warmed and cheered now, his hunger and thirst a little appeased, and with the prospect of the other meal to come, he rubbed his mouth with his hand, rested his dirty, ragged coat-sleeve on the

form, settled himself on his stool, and twinkled up at me.

"You was a-wishin' me to say, Mr. Mason," he said.

"I think Mrs. Green told you," said I, "I wanted to ask you about a boy who wishes to be a pupil of mine. I have never done such a thing before, but this seems a peculiar case. Dalton his name is."

"Dalton?" cried the Ranter, almost starting up and becoming lively at once. His coat was too tight for him, and one of the buttonholes burst as he did so. That warned him and he settled himself in his old position again.

"Yes, Dalton of Pleasant Place. Do you know him?"

"Know him," cried the Ranter, "know'm? —ah—ah!"

"You do know him then?" said I.

"Why, bless yer, Mr. Mason, yer knows no one."

"That goes without saying, and even you can hardly bless me," said I. "What do you know about him?"

"How old might he be, sir?"

The Ranter had put back his head, and his little eyes twinkled more keenly and beerily than ever.

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen? That's Andrew then; but I should 'a thought he were older nor that."

I thought not. Great as my companion's experience in the world had been, my own in boys was almost greater, and I knew how soon a hard life makes young faces careworn. But I would not argue the point.

"*Well*, Mr. Mason," cried the Ranter, snapping his fingers in great glee and triumph, "yer've lighted on one o' the worst of a bad lot, that's all I can tell yer."

"Indeed," said I. "What do you know then about the boy or his family?"

"Know, sir! Know? More than 'ud bear the tellin' perhaps. Ah—oh—uh—it's a pratty story."

"Pretty?" said I, rather drily. "Well, that's not surprising, there are a great many pretty stories about here."

"But this un's very pratty, more prattier

nor the rest of 'em, sir. A very nice family, and a good family, and a family that's had a deal to do wi' the devil."

"Most families have," quoth I.

"But it's not ev'ry family," cried the Ranter, slapping first one knee and then the other, and then both in the vehemence of his argument, "as can say as 'ow it 'as 'ad two of it 'anged—not a many families in England can say that this evenin', sir."

A little silence.

"I don't know 'ow it may have bin in the old times—as often you 'ave told me of 'em, sir"—I had never spoken to him of them—"when they 'anged people for crown bits and little sheep and such like—I don't know how necks kept themselves clear at all o' the rope then. But now, this evenin', th'are not many families as can go down to supper, and lay their 'ands on their 'arts, sir, and say as two of 'em 'as bin 'anged. Why, that chap's grandfather, sir, he were a gemman."

I smiled a little. I had heard of many improbable pedigrees before ; but my incredulity proved annoying.

"It's true, sir, true!" cried the Ranter, slapping his knees. "A gemman he were, a born gemman, and lived on a"—

"Farm?" said I.

"A 'state, sir," cried the Ranter with dignity, "a 'state wi' 'orses and green'ouses; and he farmed it 'isself, sir, and 'e drank and 'e spekkilated and 'e gambled until, sir, 'e had farmed it all into the 'ands of 'is ackerwaintences. And then, sir, he goes and calls on one of these gemmen about this, and they 'ave 'igh words, and he fetches a rewolvey and shoots 'im, and they hangs 'im for it."

"And a good riddance most likely," said I softly to the firelight, but there was a little silence again.

"Yer see, Mr. Mason," said the Ranter, becoming moral, "it isn't for you and me 'as 'adn't 'ad gemmen for our fathers to understand how gemmen's sons can get down so easy like to the dust-heaps; but sir, I've known—known"—

"Yes, but I don't want to hear your knowledge," interrupted I, not without wincing.

"Get on with your story, please. This gentleman had a son."

"Now don't you be so 'ard, Mr. Mason. They blames you for it, and yer've put me out now. One son? He 'ad two."

"All the worse."

"Now yer won't 'ear me, sir. He 'ad two—one a scamp born, sir, and th' other a nice, steady, good young man as ever yer'd wish to see; and he works, and he toils, and he learns 'isself, and he keeps clear o' his brother, and all folks say as 'e'll do well. And then he falls in love wi' a young 'ooman, and she takes to winkin' on another young man, and 'e discovers it, and then, sir, 'e asks her to go out 'wi him one day, and when they finds 'er, sir, they finds 'er in little bits—yer knows the way."

"Yes, and I don't want to hear it again," said I, almost with a shudder, for the firelight and shadows made a certain gloom in the room. "I hate to hear of a woman being injured. Go on, please. So they hanged him?"

"Well, sir," said the Ranter, slowly draw-

ing his hands down his legs as his manner was, "I won't say as 'ow if he 'ad friends as could write to the papers—it's a fine thing, sir, to 'ave friends as can write to the papers—'e mightn't a been let off, for 'e was quite mad like then; but they didn't, sir, or they couldn't, and 'e was 'anged. And then, sir, there was left this one as 'ad bin a scamp all 'is life, and 'e married Mrs. Arcet, a nice, pretty young 'ooman as you could wish to see, and quite steady like all her days; but then, yer see, sir, he couldn't quite marry 'er, as 'er 'usband was alive."

"Oh, for pity's sake," cried I, roused at last, "stop this story of horrors."

The Ranter smiled, rubbed his hands as if much pleased, and after a while went on.

"Yer see, sir, old Arcet had allays been bad to her, and when he went off to Merikay she thort she'd bide at 'ome; but the neighbours didn't take it kind, they didn't, her marryin' so soon, afore her 'usband, as she never 'eard of agin, could 'a 'ad time to die. And then, too, Dalton 'ad got a bad name amongst 'em; they say yer could trust a

born thief sooner nor him, and they calls her Mrs. Arcet still; and Dalton, he beats her at whiles they say, and she's 'ad all 'er childer called by 'er old name, as people may think when they 'ear it it's the name the clergyman 'ave given 'em, but that's no good, it ain't; and she've 'ad five childen, she and Dalton, the eldest as is good, and works, and won't have nothing to do wi' the rest o' the family 'cause they're too disrespectable for him, and a chap just growed as 'as gone to the dogs already, and a little boy and girl, and this chap as'll go to the dogs too."

I thought it probable also, remembering the look of the boy, but said nothing.

"That's Andrew," said the Ranter, gloating over the words, "the worst of the lot, a serpent."

"The worst?" asked I, "he'd have to be bad then."

"Well then, I'll just tell yer, Mr. Mason. He's a mean, dirty, lying scamp, that chap is. He's a chap as'll take it very quiet if yer hurt him, and say nothing, and look pleased mebbe, and stick a knife into yer a month after-

wards when ye least expects it. Why, when he was quite a little 'un, he was, there was a farmer as laid a whip on 'im for stealin' of plums. And he says nothin' and goes 'ome quiet, and when the 'arvest time comes he sets fire to the stacks, he do. And they brings 'im up and the farmer he takes it kind, and says as 'ow he won't ruin any boy by sending of 'im to prison—and 'e never says 'e's sorry or makes 'imself small a bit for it. And the other chaps they pelts him. And then, sir, he knows as who it was who threw the first stone, and 'e waits, and 'e waits, and weeks arter, he comes be'ind 'im, 'its at 'im with a knife, and runs for it. And that boy too, sir, is that kind as he won't 'ave 'im to prison for it. But the other fellers, they fills wi' stones a little cart as a goat used to draw and makes 'im drag it all the arternoon. And Dalton, he beats 'im like to death for it, but that he allers does, they say. And there ain't one of 'em as'll speak to or look at 'im at all—and 'e lives like a 'eathen amongst 'em. And 'e's a coward, they say, like as never was. Only there's Gallows Jack

and Neverby Ned as takes up wi' 'im sometimes cause no one'll speak to 'em neither. And they'll bring him to be hanged amongst 'em—only that he's a lad as is like enough to go into a waste first I be sorry for that, he oughter get his merits at last—a 'eathen he is."

"Yes," said I, "and treated like a heathen. And in this way the land is likely enough to convert the heathen at home. Well, do you know anything more of the lad?"

"And ain't that enough?" asked the Ranter. "Mr. Mason, if yer has that chap in yer class yer'll repent of it. And now, if quite agreeable to you," he rubbed his hand over his mouth again, "I'll drink some beer."

He made his arrangements accordingly as before, whilst I leant back, shading my face with my hand so as to feel the more alone. If I could so have shut out the family history I had just heard, I should have been all the more content. Not that it had astonished me; the interest the boy had roused in me was purely artistic, and a sort of latent repulsion made me ready enough to believe

all this evil that was spoken of him. His shrinking manner was well enough accounted for now. Yet what a story! The grandfather hanged, the uncle hanged, the mother not married, the father mean and brutal, the eldest brother too good to own his kindred, another brother ruined already. Oh, I was ready enough to believe in the boy's failings, it might well be that native as well as inherited wickedness was at work to destroy him, but even had his virtue been stronger would his chances have been great?

"A deal to do wi' the devil." Ah! truly. Born his child, educated for his service, fitted for his home. And mothers have their agony and bring their children into the world for this! And then, with that feeling of repulsion strong in me still, I thought again of the boy himself, so clever, so delicate, with those thin beautiful hands, carrying with him always that rare talent in the midst of all the wretchedness—and I remembered how I had often said to myself that I could forget my own wasted life if only one of my pupils gave the smallest promise of succeeding. Was

this to be my hope at last? Certainly there was a risk, a sort of dread too in my mind, but stronger than all rose the artist desire to have at last what might be talent to train. That was worth the risk to me. "I'll do it," I said inwardly. And then aloud, and letting my hand fall—

"Well, I've decided, I'll have the boy in my class and see what turns out with him."

The Ranter had finished his beer and had fallen into a state of pleasing meditation in consequence, but on hearing my words he started to his feet.

"Yer'll have him, Mr. Mason?" he cried. "Yer'll have Arce Dalton there? Why, the class'll go."

"Let them then," said I rather more hastily, "I won't be bullied by them in that manner, I can tell them."

"Why, Mr. Mason, yer don't know the langwidge he uses."

"That's another matter altogether. If he misconducts himself he will have to go, of course. But for the rest I don't see that I am bound to take notice of the previous life

of every pupil of mine. I doubt I should have few if I did."

"And that's true too, Mr. Mason," said the Ranter, "but this 'un, this 'un"—

"Only fourteen."

"Old enuf-f, sir, quite old enuf for the sort. And if yer do turn 'im out, Mr. Mason, what then?"

"I don't care what then."

"Yer'll be murdered in yer bed."

"I don't care if I am. There's only one thing belonging to me that he could hurt and he will not know which it is. In short, I mean to make the trial of him."

"*Well*, Mr. Mason," said the Ranter, rising to go with solemnity, "an' if these were my last 'ords I couldn't say more to yer, if yer does yer'll repent it."

"I do not think so," said I.

And I do not think so now, though the time was to come when the worst fear that could have entered my mind was more than fulfilled.

* * * * *

The Ranter was gone, escorted politely to

the door by me, that I might be sure he was clear off the premises at last. I was left alone with the firelight and the shadows, and my supper and my one companion. And now the time has come when the name and nature of that companion must needs be told.

Jeanie, forgive my folly, for though I am an old man now, I can blush for some remembrances still. Such foolish fancies had I in my loneliness, such comfort, tender even in its absurdity, I could cry now at the thought of it. I believe, I think it now, that but for that which meant so much human affection for me I could scarcely have borne those days, tortured as they were by the beginnings of a grim disease that was to cause me greater trouble in the future, by that disease of hopelessness too that seemed to grow with years for me. Oh, my darling, dear to me even now, I thank thee, and more than thee, that I was not left to live through those years alone.

The firelight shone on my bare room, caught the edges of the few chairs and forms, gave warm pleasure to my tired bones and

gleamed full on my friend as she rested on a chair by me. I had brought her in as I did every evening from the workroom, that she might spend the silent hours alone with me. Oh, Jeanie, I shrink a little from writing this even now, it all meant so much to me and may seem such folly to you. But you must have patience with me.

Imagine then, a bust, a small bust, not so much as two feet high—a pretty, demure woman face, hair parted fine, with only the smallest wave in it and gathered into a little knot behind, eyelids drooping a little, soft quiet lips, beneath one word “Psyche.” That was my enchantress. Not such a Psyche this as that of whom Hans Andersen wrote his wonderful story; not such a one as I have seen myself, slender, lovely, scornful, lips quivering even in the marble with the pain of the lot that bound the earth-born to heaven; my Psyche was no such marvel as these. A sensible, pretty face she had, womanly, quiet and modest, with a sort of repose about it. That reserve of charms suited me. I had loved another style of

beauty once, and had gained no good by it. But how had I come into possession of my friend ?

Some years before had died a young sculptor. He had led a wretched sort of life, ambitious like me, poor like me, and like me too, unable to succeed. But then I reckoned that his troubles were owing in chief part to himself, so I was not perplexed over him. When he died he did his best to divide his possessions, which were few, amongst his creditors, who were many—to me, for I too had lent him money, he left a little bust that he had found himself unable to sell. I went to his house in London—he had died in Rome—to get it. It had a deserted, miserable look, the blinds partly down, the doors open, the furniture in part removed, dust over everything, and rough men everywhere. I found my way to his studio, and there, in the midst of odds and ends, paint-brushes, drawing materials, tools and lumps of clay I found the poor little thing alone. So sad it looked, so white and desolate in the desolation I could not but be sorry for it. And this was the

last work his hands had touched and he had remembered to leave it to me. I took it home with me and that evening as I sat alone by the firelight with her I told her that she had lost a wild master but had scarce gained a happier one now. And then I think I said that she should not be knocked about the world again, but for his sake should find a home with me. Three days after I came down to L— and she came with me.

Jeanie, you ought to live alone before you can know how folly grows in the silence. All my loneliness, all the miseries of the disease that was beginning, and all the fancies too that I had lost the artist-power to paint, and that hurt and burned sometimes, found an outlet now. Into my Psyche's ears I poured my wretchedness, beseeching her constantly to have pity on me. And she would listen too, or so it seemed to me. Man or woman would have been hateful to me in such moments, I had no trust for either, but my Psyche could not be faithless to me, nor lose the qualities I myself had given her. Before long, however, I lost all sense of the gift—

she became in very truth a living personality to me. And as such I think of her now. A quiet, modest manner she had, a little gentle smile, there was something reliable in the way of her. If she had lived she would have been a good wife and mother, though there was rather more demureness about her than some people would have liked. Reserved she was, that was her failing, but that made her all the more communicative to me.

For my Psyche too had her troubles that she used to confide to me in the evenings when the firelight shone on us both. She had one desire that was always with her, and lived with her through the years, and yet it was not so much a desire either as the consciousness of a want. A feeling of coldness haunted her, an ignorance and a lack of something that she could not gain for herself, nor I for her. That troubled her sometimes. Beneath her pretty head no human heart could beat, there were times when she would have liked to feel the warm life pulsing through her veins, that she might pass the ice-barrier and be like other women, who

live and suffer in this world of ours. In vain I used to tell her, to comfort her, that if she had been born a woman she would have had to wear stays and go into society, that she must then have had the trouble of a husband, or the loneliness of the old age that has no children to comfort it. That could not quite satisfy her; but it was the best I could do. In my folly it seemed then that all the perplexity was hers, I suppose now that it was my own unsatisfied brain transferring its trouble to her. Yet now—even now—it troubles me to explain away her personality; she did live, and lives still for me. I had a sort of reverence and cherishing fondness for her—she seemed a little thing that I could guard and protect—and I did care for her. In my fancy she was my daughter always. As for admiration—that which a man gives to a woman—that had nothing to do with my ideas; I never gave that either in fancy or reality since the days of the love that I gave—and lost—when I was young. So my Psyche and I spent our quiet evenings by the firelight together.

Well, have you had enough of folly? Then hear some sense. Arce Dalton came on Monday, and became my pupil. And the rest of the class were alarmed and agitated, but not one of them left. And after that the days went on very quietly till nearly a year had passed.

CHAPTER III.

AND now, before I come to the catastrophe that was to alter entirely our relations towards each other, I ought perhaps to say a few words of this my early acquaintance with the boy—my best pupil I have called him. Looking back through the years I can see his figure distinctly; but he is rather difficult to describe notwithstanding.

Imagine then, a sallow, ill-conditioned looking lad with dark eyes gleaming suspiciously round at the corners of the room, and a power of twitching all over that I have never seen surpassed or equalled. The smallest noise used to affect him sometimes as if it were a torture, the scrape of a pencil even could be an agony to him. Yet he could make noises enough himself, shuffling his feet on the floor, or knocking up against the forms as he walked. Only when he drew he was so absorbed that his whole appearance altered. I think he was always hungry,

he had a ravenous look about him, and I have seen him gather together in his hand the crumbs that others had been rubbing their drawings with when he thought no one was looking. Perhaps this accounted in some degree too for the dark wildness in his eyes, which though not large, always made a very peculiar feature in his appearance. He was rather tall, but very slight, with bones that seemed smaller than a girl's, and so thin was he that these bones became almost painfully visible. His hands I have mentioned before—and they were worth looking at—for the rest he was not a beauty.

It was quite curious to see the hatred with which all the rest of the class regarded him. Not that it showed itself in active ill-will or cruelty—perhaps my presence restrained that—it was rather more like the behaviour of those who consider themselves of a superior order. No one would sit next him; if on some form or by some table any boy was compelled to be near him, that boy would turn his shoulder, keep his legs and arms close together, and otherwise intimate that.

he considered some sort of touching a de-
filement. Mingled with this well-bred con-
duct also there was, in word at least, some
attempt at rougher jokes, whispered words
of mysterious meaning, and little portraits
of donkeys on forms and copybooks whose
signification at least was plain. On these
occasions Arce, whose ears and eyes were
wonderfully keen where he himself was con-
cerned, would turn and glance covertly round,
his thin young face green with misery, and
his dark glance flaming into such a madness
as almost amazed me. But never in my
presence would he say a word—a malicious,
well-pleased smile haunting his lips when
some boy fell, or was hurt, or was blamed by
me was almost the only revenge he took when
I was near.

I have called him by his nickname, for it
was indeed that by which I was accustomed
to address him. When he first came to me I
tried hard to call him “Dalton,” and though
he would often start when he heard the word,
I think he was pleased with me for the
attempt. But he was not used to the title,

would often not reply to it, I always heard him spoken of by the other, was often compelled to call him that myself to those who would not have known him by any other name—finally I fell into it unconsciously. I had not liked it at first, but after awhile it became natural; one grotesquerie more seeming to add little to one so grotesque already.

Well, I think I ought now to speak of him as a pupil.

When Arce first came to me I made up my mind that I would make no difference between his training and that of the others, thinking it wrong to spend more pains on the lad because he had more talent than the rest. But I soon found that this intention of mine could not be executed. In fact, I began with a difference, for wishing to take down my lord's conceit, and also, it must be owned, desiring to tempt and draw forth whatever rebellion might be in him, I put him back at once to the merest barest outlines my copies could furnish, squares, bricks, bits of leaves, and such

like. For, thought I, I should see his temper then. But not at all. He received the copies quietly from my hand, laboured over them all the afternoon without lifting his eyes—for I kept away from him—and at the end presented me with a series of outlines so sharply drawn, so gracefully correct, that I stood and looked at them in amazement. Nevertheless, still wishing to test his humour, I kept him at that sort of work for a week, at the end of which time I could not but own inwardly that he had the truest eyes, the lightest and quickest hand I had ever taught.

I took away my copies then, and instructed him in many things. He had no knowledge of object drawing; I provided him with tubs and chairs; he had no knowledge of figure drawing—those who teach themselves seldom have—I routed up for his benefit all the models of arms, feet, fists, grasping fingers, and muscular legs that the place could furnish, for I had several of these. Then, to comfort these elementary labours, I allowed him at intervals little studies in oils or water-

colours, for he had made some progress by himself in both of these. Great difficulty had I in persuading him that these little groups I arranged for him were studies and not pictures at all, for his active imagination was always longing to improve upon the subject.

“That may do for the future,” I would tell him as I erased some line or background his fancy had supplied, “for the present what you have to do is to copy every line and shadow you see before you and let your invention rest.”

He had an intense love of colours, and very graceful and beautiful his colouring was, but often fearfully inaccurate notwithstanding. I kept a sharp watch over him for that. Then, for I was always afraid that he might turn out *only* graceful after all, I went out of doors, and working with my left hand when my right failed, produced some rough, dark, charcoal drawings and gave them to him to copy, though I saw that it went to his heart to make such black marks on the paper. When he had mastered these I made him do

his tubs and baskets in charcoal, and though he hated the work at first, after awhile he gained freedom, and began to be fond of it.

Well, what an old fool I am to talk so much of these ways of mine to you. But oh, Jeanie, if you had ever had such a pupil as that !

Let me be quick. During that first year he made marvellous progress ; my teaching could scarcely keep pace with it. I used to lie awake at night, thinking how best to help him and give him the strength and breadth he needed. Yet you must not think either that I neglected the rest ; in class there were none to whom I gave so little time as to him, nor did I comfort and encourage him either as I did the others. Often my only action, when I came up to him at last, was to draw my pencil or brush over all that he had been doing. The rest might blunder and bungle, give me their careless work and their slow advances ; I would praise and help, and do what I could for them, but Arce should never paint anything but his very best for me. Nor did I blame myself for my harshness ; I was

giving him "meat" instead of "milk," and I knew he ought to be grateful to me. I think he was too, and yet even then there used to come a look over his face sometimes that told me his self-restraint might not endure for ever.

That was the worst of it. After the first few weeks I had always the feeling of a possible conflict, which, knowing my own passionate nature as well as his, I was desirous to keep off as long as might be. With the other boys he had frequent battles. I used to enter sometimes in the midst of a scuffle, or hear his voice when I came up the stairs—a voice that was cracked and unpleasant when he spoke loud—shouting or almost shrieking out words that I should be sorry to disgrace these pages by transcribing. But these things always ceased when I entered, and I thought it better to take no notice of them. Once I saw him—so naturally too—put out his foot, without raising his eyes, that a boy might fall over it, but the boy did not know afterwards why he had fallen, and I took no notice of that. Inwardly I con-

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sidered young Dalton a most repulsive specimen, but my business was with the artist part of him, and I let the rest of him alone. Only sometimes I could not but wonder whether it was worth while to take so much trouble with such an outcast after all.

And sometimes, too, I was sorry for him; he seemed so made up of suffering. The smallest noise, as I have said, could torment him, the smallest pain seemed a torture to him. He used to come to the class now and then, pale and wan, with heavy eyelids, and sit by his dear work all the afternoon, looking at it with hungry eyes, but yet scarcely touching it, so weak seemed then the hand that he did not care to lift. At times, too, he would be beset by a dry, hard cough; I was glad that when the summer came that went at last. I think he must have had hard times at home; he used to look very strangely often when he came to the class, but he had a young power of recovery, and as the summer went on his health grew stronger, and I ceased to be uneasy about it, though, again, but for my artist-feeling, I

doubt if I should have cared for his health at all.

Do you ask me if I did any kindness to him through all these long months? Well, I taught him, as you have seen, for nothing; then I often gave him bits of paint or canvas, though that I did to all of them, and twice in the winter, meeting him with hungry eyes near a neighbouring cookshop, I emptied my pockets of coppers and told him to go in and eat. God knows, Jeanie—I write the words reverently—that I do not relate in any spirit of self-exaltation such miserable acts of charity, but that you may understand what came after it will be best for you to know first all the relations between us. Indeed, I was not given to overmuch charity then.

Ah, well, the summer passed, slowly enough to my suffering, yet all too quickly for my Psyche and me.

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No, I must linger for a while over that summer still, and you must forgive me.

I remember now that I have never yet de-

scribed my classes to you. When I first came to L— I tried to get pupils amongst the sons of the rich and in the schools, and failed. Then—it was a sudden speculation on my part—I took these great rooms over the shops by the side of the water, and set up in them cheap classes for the poor, a little in the style of the schools of art one hears so much of now. The half-yearly payment for each pupil was almost nominal, so small was it, but I got my name up in the neighbourhood, and the mechanical drawing I taught them making them fit for higher wages in the foundry close by, the boys came to me in numbers. But for that I could not have managed it. I suppose there was not much regular schooling or work done in the neighbourhood; they came in and out to me through all the day as they had time. My three rooms had been one, and were divided by wooden partitions that did not quite reach to the ceiling, and had once been painted green; the first was my class-room, ornamented by the presence of my Psyche on a wooden pillar, by forms, tables, and easels, and by various casts and

drawings; the second my big, unfurnished sitting-room, with my wooden arm-chair and a bit of carpet by the fire, one form, one three-legged stool, one small table, and a desert of boards; the third my little painting room, where also my other goods were bestowed. On the left of that again—the uppermost room of a part of the building that jutted out from the side of the house—was my bedroom; you went up three steps to it. And that was all.

And perhaps you ask me now how much painting I was doing then. Well, none, or what counted for none with me. I had, indeed, of late years made great progress in painting with my left hand, and had even begun, like a fool, to build some hopes on that, but after my illness had laid well hold of me I found myself obliged to leave off all work that did not gain me bread. My drawings would not sell now, even my old drawings; the public had got tired of me, and I was obliged to reserve myself for my pupils. Ah, well, I felt almost too heart-sick to care. In some way or other the time passed.

But that summer—

That summer. How well I can remember it now ! Haunting feelings of growing infirmity, many cares for my pupils, quiet hours with my Psyche at night. I did not altogether dislike those months—they were hot, and there were roses—a sort of langour was on my brain, and I felt pretty much at rest. Only now and then, in the night time chiefly—never once in working hours, thank God for that—I would be seized with such pains as forced me to leave my bed and stagger downstairs into my sitting-room to wrestle it all out there, lying on my bit of carpet in the darkness, for somehow I felt happier there than in my bedroom above. I never went near my Psyche in such moments; they were too grim for her; but sometimes, when the worst was over, I would go trembling into the next room, so dim and strange in the light of early morning, lay my cheek against her cold forehead, and feel that she was glad for me. Then I would hasten back to bed again, for I was forced to get what sleep I could that I might be ready for my work in

the morning. I found long afterwards that the other lodgers, and my landlady and her maid, had known much more of my illness than I had fancied, but no one ever offered any comfort or assistance to me at all.

In the spring I had been to a London doctor, who had told me that I must give up even my teaching immediately. I can remember that day. There was a square table in the room with a red cloth on it. I stood by that and looked at him.

"Will you kindly tell me," I asked at last, "how I am to live?"

"If you have never saved," said he, rather startled, but sternly too.

I felt a lump rise in my throat. My poor savings!—just beginning to accumulate again now.

"I have some money," said I, "but I do not want to touch it. Well, I will do what I can."

"That means," said he, "that you will go on working?"

"Yes."

"Then you will kill yourself."

I laughed out loud.

“When I come to you in the summer,” said I, “you shall tell me if I have killed myself.”

Then I forced on him his fee, and went back to L—. I did not feel much frightened. I knew I had strength like iron, and I thought it quite possible that might conquer yet; and it did too, but not till many weary years had passed.

One bad bout, though, was got through that summer, and, though worse came after, I was, never, perhaps, so thankful to be relieved from one again. When I went up to the doctor again in July he was absolutely astonished at me. That pleased me with a certain sense of triumph, though there had been times before when my despair and pain had almost been too much for me after all. He told me that he would leave the treatment of me pretty much in my own hands, and that I might now do as I liked, only that I must still be careful not to work too much, and not to get annoyed or troubled if I could help it. He told me, too, that though pain,

and perhaps danger, might return, he thought that, for the present at least, I should be more free from suffering; and then, with great difficulty, I made him take his fee once more.

I think I have never in my life felt so glad as on that evening; not that I had any youthful hopes for the future—I thought that I should be always ill and heartsick, a hard, lonely man with a defeated life—still I was relieved. I had got a sort of grip over my illness, and that made me proud, and if it did return again, more badly, and kill me, that also might be for the best. At any rate, my worst nightmares were over for the present; I would fight out the battle for the fun of it, and the final defeat might seem the best part of it all to me. So I thought. That evening, on my return, I got out at the station before L—. This was a little treat given me by myself for my good behaviour. It was a lovely summer's evening. I bought some rolls at a baker's shop in the village, and some new milk at a farm-house; then I wandered about in the fields till sunset,

lying down on the grass, looking at the corn, golden already, and at the country that was so blue in the distance, pleasing myself with every sight and sound as if I had become a child again. Then at last I threw myself down by a little pool—a pool that had reeds round it and trees near—and thought of my Psyche, and saw the glorious sunset flash on the edges of it, and the red, floating clouds far beneath in it as they were far above. Then I ran hard to the station, caught the train, and got back home before the night had fallen. That evening was happy.

Jeanie, you will call me a heathen, and so I was, yet comfort was given to me, and I am grateful still. That evening has lived with me often since. I was in sore need of it then, for trouble was coming.

CHAPTER IV.

JUST before the beginning of the holidays, which only lasted a fortnight, there had come a very strange change in the behaviour of Arce Dalton to me. Looking back now with every desire to blame myself I yet cannot say that any wrong in me was the cause of it. But it came notwithstanding. I can remember the very day it began—curiously enough, you will tell me, though it seems natural to me—I had come up behind his shoulder at the end of the afternoon as usual to look at his work one day, and he was so absorbed as to scarcely notice my approach. He was painting—for a change—some stone steps on which a number of roses had fallen, a dark iron door was above, the light behind which cast a deep shadow on the steps. I had given him this difficult subject that he might know how little he could do, and the door and the shadow I had painted for the most part myself. But he had succeeded

marvellously with the cool, bright roughness of the stones below and as a reward I had left him the roses too.

Now as I stood behind and saw the red blossoms he had painted, the delicate leaves and stems falling over the roughness of the stones, the arrangement so perfect, the colours so graceful and true, the passionate crimson of the roses so much more tenderly touched than my own rough darkness above—a sort of wonder came over me. My left hand gave a grip to his shoulder, my words came in a gasp—I had never so praised or touched him before.

“You *will* paint,” I said. He looked up suddenly, a look that I remember still and with pleasure—startled, humble, inquiring—a question as if he were asking me of the future; then he dropped his brush and hid his face in his hands to hide the tears in his eyes.

In another instant I was called away and he went on painting as before. But for the rest of that evening he was very quiet and subdued indeed.

Now would you not think, Jeanie, that such a moment would have been sufficient to make friends of us both for life? Its results were in the contrary direction. The very moment that he entered my room next morning I saw the difference in him at once; for me, I had been vexed with myself for my impulsive praise and had determined not to err in that direction again. Somehow I had fancied it would change him in some way, but for the subdued insolence that was now in his manner I was not prepared and it irritated me. Only of course I would take no notice of it. But it moved me still to do something to that I might not perhaps otherwise have had the heart to do—directly he got out his painting I told him to put it away and return to his outline figure drawing from the cast again.

“Let that other alone now, will you?” said I, “you have done as much to it as is good for you, and I will not have you finish till you know your business more thoroughly.”

That was good advice and true, but I do not suppose I should have put him back to

outlines if I had not been angry with him. As for him, I do not think he knew at all how deeply he had affected me, and only supposed my command to be a part of my usual tyranny. From that time till the holidays, though he gave me no rude word and no direct act of disobedience, the insolence of his manner and look never ceased and he became a perpetual torment to me.

I have told you that it all seemed natural to me, and so it does still, though I can hardly tell you why. It was not that my praise had made him conceited, there were other motives if one can call them so. I think now, for I did not think over the reasons then, that the lad, half-crazed as I believe him to have been, had long been keeping himself in a state of constraint that was not natural to him, and that the sudden softening produced by my praise had only made the certain reaction more sudden to him.

I think too, indeed I know, that the other boys had long laughed at him for his submission to me, had more than hinted that he was afraid of me, and had asked him if it was

that he had not paid for his schooling, words likely enough to be galling to him, especially when accompanied with comments on the tears that I also had seen.

There is one thing more, besides, more difficult to account for. I think that in the minds of such unhappy creatures, perverse and twisted through years of evil, there can and will rise insane feelings of bitterness owning no adequate cause either to commence or support them, but as strong and real, notwithstanding, as if self-interest itself were guiding them.

If these reasons will not satisfy you, Jeanie, I am sorry, for I know no better, but I think they should. When he left me for the holidays I could only hope against hope that he might return in a better frame of mind if he returned at all—but my first sight of him when he came back was sufficient to dispel that illusion at once. He had been seen a good deal with Gallows Jack and his crew during the fortnight—so the others told me—and the intercourse did not seem to have improved him, he looked more starved and

pinched, more defiantly sulky and scornful than ever. I knew at once that I should have a great deal to endure from him before the next few weeks were over.

And indeed I had. He began, much to my astonishment, by paying me, not only for the months during which I had taught him but for the coming half-year as well (I learned long afterwards that he got the money from his mother and that his father beat her for it). Then, as if all scores were now cleared between him and me, and as if he were now utterly at liberty to do whatever he pleased, he began to be as insolently disobedient as if he owed me no sort of gratitude at all, sneering when I spoke to him, whistling, idling, making grimaces, and not always attending even when I corrected his work or gave him instructions as to his painting.

I had not seen my way to refusing the money when he offered it to me, nor did I quite like to dismiss him now, since he had the cleverness always to keep his conduct within some sort of bounds, so I took no notice of him. But you can think how

pleasant it was for me, ill as I was, to be thwarted in this manner.

Pleasant too to see that the rest of the class, who all professed affection for me, were now inclined to elevate him into a sort of hero, merely because he insulted me; they would not speak to him, but they looked on him with more interest, and some of them even followed his example and whistled and grimaced like him.

These I rebuked sharply enough to frighten them, the principal offender only I left always alone, caring little for what the rest might think of this. For I knew that I had not strength for many combats with him and had already determined that our first fight should be our last as well. So, though my fingers often tingled to give him the thrashing he deserved, I kept my hands and tongue in check, inwardly considering that if I gave him rope enough he would hang himself with it before long.

Looking back on the matter now and remembering that I had been warned what sort of spirit of a devil the boy had in him, re-

membering too my own passionate nature, I doubt if I were right in this. But I was ill enough to long to spare myself—afterwards I had leisure for repentance.

So the months went on, far from pleasantly. Arce was long enough in coming to a point, I began sometimes to be afraid that he would not give way to any outbreak at all. Indeed open rebellion was hardly in his nature, cowed and beaten down as that had always been; the wild glare under his overhanging brows only came out from them in furtive glances; he would never look you in the face to be rude to you. Nevertheless, in spite of this, the mad fire burnt beneath.

I need not have feared, it was sure to come out before long. He was still making progress in his work, though he might have made much greater if he had chosen to attend to me. The rest bungled on as usual and the months passed till the autumn came and almost the winter.

Oh, Jeanie, I dread so much what is coming next. I could not tell you the pain and fear with which I shrink from the

thought of it even now. But I will try, and you must have pity on me—for this was worse even than my father's ruin to me, it seemed to break my heart then. I must write it.

* * * * *

One morning, the thirtieth of November, more than a year after young Dalton had first come to me, we were all sitting at work, all but myself, who stood always, as usual. There had been a long silence, and I, rejoicing in the rest of it, had been hastening on with my corrections. All at once the shoemaker's son, of whom I have spoken before, rounded his eyes, stretched his arm straight out, and pointing so with his pencil to where my *Psyche* was on her wooden pillar, spoke in a voice that was distinctly audible all over the room.

“I say, master, let me draw that 'ere.”

(Perhaps I ought to mention, by way of parenthesis, that my friend had now been advanced to heads.)

“*What?*” said I.

“*That,*” said he, pointing again.

There was a little silence of astonishment, for no one in all the class had ever copied the *Psyche*. As for me, following his glance with mine, I almost felt my lips tremble. All through the previous night I had been sleepless, and in intervals of work, for I had made use of my sleeplessness for my drawing, I had sat with my forehead leaning against the little bust, thinking of the young dead sculptor and of the friend of my fancies, too, until I could not be lonely. But all this would mean nothing to the boys. I recovered after an instant.

"Nonsense," said I, "you have the *Venus*, and the *Ajax*, and the head of the *Laocoon*, and a boy with a goose," for I had hired these things. "What more do you want?"

"I want to draw that," said he.

"Then you can't."

"Mr. Mason," said the Rover, looking up, "what is that?"

"That?—*Psyche*."

"Yes, I know that," for the curate had taught him mythology, "but why mayn't we draw it?"

I hesitated a little. I had been awake all the previous night, and at work all day. My nerves were not so steady as usual, or I think I should have kept silence.

"James," said I to the shoemaker's son, "you have a good father who looks after you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, John, have a picture that an artist gave you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, Rover, you have a friend who pays for your drawing lessons now?"

"Yes."

"Yes. Well, then, I have not a father, nor a good picture, nor a friend, nor a home, nor pleasant things about me. But I have this little thing that a friend left me who is dead; and so, because I have only this, it has come to be to me like home and friends and brothers and the rest of them. It is all I have that I care for—like a companion to me. I think I should break my heart if I lost it, for then I should have nothing left."

Silence, and then a loud, rude, jarring

laugh that rang through the room. I did not need to look round to see who the laugher was. But I had been speaking with much emotion—foolishly—and the sudden sense of this made the blood rush to my face, as if I had been a girl.

“Come,” I said to the class, “we will go on now.”

But I could not lose the sense of my unwonted conduct; I was hurt as I had never been before. A minute afterwards I stole a glance at Arce; he was laughing still. I clenched my hands, and muttered inwardly that if we ever did come across each other it should be bad for him.

We did come across each other that afternoon. And now I must write the rest of it.

CHAPTER V.

THAT afternoon when I entered the classroom, after an absence of a few minutes—but here I must stop to tell you something that had occurred before.

My boys were, as you know, for the most part, the sons of foundrymen or of small shopkeepers. They all lived in the midst of poverty, and were the roughest lot of pupils I have ever had to deal with at all. I did not like them less for that, but it made them more difficult to keep in order sometimes. Many rules would not have done for them, so I made as few as I could, my reputation for hardness assisting me, and only now and then needed to enforce these at all. For, indeed, with the one exception, they were a good set of lads enough, and though terribly afraid of me were willing to do what I required, so on the whole we managed well together. But there was one failing I never could stand, a subject on which their ideas were far more

liberal than mine ; this was the touching of personal property that belonged to me. If I left a book about I did not like it opened, my paint brushes must not be meddled with, nor my drawings moved. They learnt this after a while ; only now and then temptation was too strong for them still. Now, a short while before I had hired for a life-study a little boy from one of the schools that were near, a small mother's darling, who could not understand what it was to be made a model of at all. He would stand before us always with his head so hanging, his lips so quivering, his blue eyes so swimming in tears, that at last, seeing that we had engaged him, and that his father was determined that we should make use of him, I made of him a study of guilt and shame together—made for him a paper fool's cap with a tassel and "Dunce" written on it in large letters, and set him to wear it before us. Rover reconciled him to it at last by the number of acid drops he gave him at intervals during the ceremony. Now this fool's cap was a great institution when first invented, but proved a fearful tempta-

tion to my class notwithstanding. Over and over again I would find it on the head of a little boy, on the top of a cask, or the end of a broomstick, until at last, worn out with speaking of it, I declared that the first boy that touched it again, whether great or small, should wear it himself. That checked them, and when on the morning of which I speak I had taken it out meaning to put it away that night, I did not think that any one would meddle with it now. But coming in after a few minutes absence *this* is what I saw :

The whole class had left their work, and formed a group round the fireplace. Before the table on the left hand of the fire stood young Dalton ; the fool's cap was in front of him resting on the grim brows of Ajax—said to be like my own. Arce's hand was extended towards it as if he were a showman, the boys made a grinning half-circle round him. He commanded their whole attention for once.

“Look, you fellows!” he was saying; “*this* is Mr. Mason, and this is how he would be ornamented if he had his due.”

"Oh, come now, Dalton," expostulated the Rover, "that's past a joke."

"Be ashamed of yourself," said young Brown, my tallest and steadiest pupil.

But the rest were delighted.

"Mr. Mason 'll turn you out for this," said the shoemaker's son.

"I don't care if he do."

"What! aren't you afraid of him?"

"Afraid? I? By"—and then came some oaths—"what is there in him to be afraid of?"

"Not much, I own," said I, advancing; "but you will have to wear my fool's cap for all that."

They had been making such a noise that they had not heard me, though my tread was never light. Now, at first sound of my voice, they scattered in all directions. Arce, too, whose first instinct on such occasions was always to be a coward, shrunk backwards with the rest. That general movement enabled me to get possession of the fool's cap and put it up on the high mantelpiece beyond reach of harm. Then I turned to the boy,

who had recovered his insolence now, and confronted me, glaring at me from under his dark eyebrows, yet trembling a little too. The table was behind him, and I stood in front, so as to cut off any chance of escape. Then, in that instant's pause, I found reason to repent of my foolish threat, which had drawn me into such a scene as this. I had not fancied that one of the older boys would accept the challenge. The conflict was before me. I would not attempt to escape it now.

"Well," said I, "are you ready for your adornment yet?"

"I won't wear it! I won't!"

"You won't?"

"I'll go home; I'm tired of your schoolin'. I don't want no more of it; I'll go home now."

"And so you shall," said I, "but you shall wear the fool's cap first."

"I shan't!" with an oath, and in another instant he had slipped under my arm; I had only just time to catch at him as he went. Even then—it was his sleeve that I had clutched—he almost contrived to wriggle out.

of his jacket, so lithe was he ; but my grasp was on his arm, and his case became hopeless. Then, finding himself detained, in a sort of frenzy such as I have never seen before or since, he struggled, kicked, panted, tried to bite, shrieked out oaths and foul words, and tried to tear at my coat with his hands. I quietly backed him to the wall on the right of the fireplace and held him there. He leant back, white, panting, glaring at me with madness in his eyes. If looks could have killed me I should have had then small hope of life ; but I was a strong man, and he was but a slight lad, so I was not afraid of him.

“ I shan’t ! I shan’t ! ” he kept crying between his struggles.

I held him and kept quiet.

“ I can make you,” said I at last, as calmly as possible.

“ If you do, Mr. Mason ”—he was almost too breathless to speak ; his words came with a hissing sound, whilst his eyes burned—“ I’ll do you a mischief, I will.”

“ Very well ; I don’t care,” said I. “ Will you be quiet now ? ”

Then, as he began to struggle once more, I lifted him up easily from the ground, laid him across a form, and, placing his hands behind his back, tied his wrists together with a bit of cord I picked up from the ground. Lifting him up once more, I placed him by the wall at the side of the fireplace, and with the ends of the cord fastened his hands to a solitary peg on which my hat hung sometimes. I then placed the fool's cap on his head.

His face was livid and his eyes cast down, but he offered no resistance at all. No one laughed; the class were struck with awe, and were as still as mice when I turned to them. They kept quiet like that all the afternoon.

But I was trembling with passion. I had been insulted, defied; the mere fact of the struggle would have been sufficient to excite me, and I dared not think what might happen if he defied me to such a conflict again. My hands shook, I could scarcely keep my voice steady, and the drawings seemed to swim before my eyes. Never had self-control

seemed more difficult to me ; but he who has learnt to teach has learnt in some measure to keep himself under as well. I went from one to another, correcting and suggesting, until by slow degrees the flame burnt itself out, and I felt myself calm once more. Then I felt also ready to release him. I had been waiting for that moment to come.

I looked at my watch. Nearly an hour had passed ; I had not thought it had been so long. Then I looked at him. He was still white as chalk, and his eyes were still cast down ; I think he had hardly moved so much as an eyelash all the time. I cut the cord ; then with some difficulty cut it again and untwisted it from his wrists ; at the same time I took the fool's cap from his head. He did not move at once, seeming to take no notice, and for the first time I saw what a passion I must have been in, for the marks on his wrists were blue. When I looked at these, and felt how tightly I must have drawn the cord, felt, too, that I had left him for nearly an hour in a position of so much pain, I was indeed ashamed of myself. I

would have liked to have said so, only some instinct told me that would only make worse of what was bad already. I walked to the fire and put the fool's cap in it instead. Arce went in a dull and dreary way to his place, sat down before his easel with his clasped hands on his knees, and so remained, without touching his work, for the rest of the afternoon.

Once I came behind him when I had done with the others, but, seeing no change in his picture, turned away with a shrug of my shoulders; if he chose to sulk it was no business of mine. Oh! if I had acted differently all through I might have avoided what came next—but that is useless now.

A man called me from the door. An artist I had known was in the town, and wished to see me before he started for London. I went at once.

Late that evening I returned, so tired that I could only just stumble upstairs to bed, where a heavy slumber overtook me immediately. It was the last good night's rest I had for many a long year to come.

The light was still dim and gray in my room when I woke in the morning. (See, I have made a blot; my hand begins to shake now.) I lay half-awake, pleased with my sleep, whilst there still came and went in my head my unwonted gaiety, the young men at supper, the songs they had sung, and all the jokes lavished on me because I would only drink one glass of champagne with them. It was pleasant to think of; like very old times come back again. Then I thought of Arce, and the trouble and vexation he was to me, and wondered whether it would not be better to get rid of him entirely now; and then, still only half asleep, I fell into a sweet-morning dream—a wonderful thing for me—and there came one stealing behind me with a soft, quiet step as one used to have of old, and I turned round as with an old expectation and saw my Psyche's face—like herself, like my old love; I could not understand it, and woke myself in a rage. Then, as I rose, I thought that as soon as I was dressed I would just go into the class-room, look at my one treasure, and bring back the

boys' drawings to correct before breakfast-time was come.

Oh, Jeanie, I feel inclined to linger now, but I must go on. The schoolroom was dim and gray when I entered it. My first glance showed me that the Psyche was gone. For one instant my heart felt as if it had stopped beating; then I looked down. In another moment I was on the floor, sobbing as if I had indeed become a child again. Battered, broken; there was no beauty left in my Psyche to greet me now. Oh, I thank God that it was not anger I felt in that hour—not anger—though the second glance had seemed to stab me more than the first had done; for there on the floor beside what was left of her was the heavy hammer that I had thought only my arm could lift. Cruel hands had touched my treasure, cruel feet had trodden on her—I could see the marks of them there; a cruel will had determined that not one piece of her should be left uninjured to comfort me with the memory still. Oh, I felt too sad, too heart-sick, to feel that anyone *could* do this to me in my loneliness, to be angry then;

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a lesser grief might have moved me more. But the sight stopped my sobbing. By the side of all that was left of her I lay down on the floor, and felt as if I should not have life or strength to move again.

The clock below struck eight.

An hour or more must have passed. In another hour the boys would come—even now the charwoman might be entering. I rose slowly, determined to be brave. Nevertheless the sight of the broken pieces again moved me to a horrible fit of weeping, but that was over at last. I rose, went out, and locked the schoolroom door; then I went to my own room and washed my face. After that I heard the steps of the little maid of the house coming up the stairs, and went out to meet her, for I had some questions to ask.

“Did all the boys go home at the usual hour yesterday?”

“Yes, all but one.”

“Which one?”

“The one as never went wi’ the others.”

I knew that before.

“ Was there any noise heard in the afternoon ? ”

“ Yes, a 'ammerin'. The gentlemen ” (that is, the drunken lodgers) “ wished Mr. Mason would not 'ammer so much at once.”

No, Mr. Mason would not hammer ; they need not be alarmed.

I told her not to come or let the charwoman come till I called ; then I went back to my room.

In a few minutes I had decided what to do. I made my bed and set my room in order as usual. Then I went down into the garden—a dingy spot with a ruined rockery and much broken glass, and chose out a place by the old yew tree, the only tree I was fond of. Coming back, I left word that I was going out into the country, the boys must go on working as usual, and I would be back by the afternoon. Then I went into the school-room, locking the door after me, gathered up all the broken pieces, searching carefully on my knees lest the smallest atom should escape me, collected them into a rough cloth I had with me, and took them down into the garden

to the yew tree. There I laid my Psyche, crying like a baby all the while I buried her, there I laid the earth on her, and knelt by her side, saying something like a prayer when it was done. A foolish thought, as it had all been a fool's fancy, yet it had helped me. There by what seemed like a grave I knelt and said that I would never care for thing or creature again. Then I rose and went, yet stood to linger a little while before I could leave her.

So it died, my one dream, leaving me desolate. They say the next world gives us back a great deal, I sometimes wonder if it will give me my Psyche again.

CHAPTER VI.

AT four o'clock that afternoon I stood outside my schoolroom door. I had not been able to return till then, and now, as I felt how fast my heart was beating, I doubted if I had not returned too soon.

All those hours I had been wandering—wandering out into the fields far beyond the town, into lonely lanes where the winter snows had not yet fallen, and up bare hillsides whose two deep ruts only showed that carts could pass there. Everything was so still; I remember that there was scarcely a breath of wind in the December day, the country that lay beneath you from the hilltops was brown and purple, motionless beneath the greyiness of the sky, only here and there a wisp of smoke showed where fires were lighted in the homesteads. No snow had fallen yet that year. I had brought some bread with me, but the fierce excitement in my throat would not allow me to eat. I

must wander on and on. Only at last, at half-past one by my watch, I sat on the log of a fallen tree at the top of one of those hillsides I have spoken of, and forced some mouthfuls on myself. Then I turned and walked back, a long way; I was faint with pain and fatigue before the lights of the town gleamed through the darkness before me. It was a black evening, they had lit the gas-lamps early. Wearily I went down the High Street, and so on by the river, till I got to my lodging at last. It had been a long day, a terrible day, but though all through I had never once been able to think, it seemed to me that the worst of my excitement was over; I need not now fear to disgrace the strength the Lord had given to me.

Yet, as I stood in the darkness by the school room door, I trembled, beyond my self-control to help. I should see the others, should have to speak to them. Well, it must be borne. I nerved myself and entered. Then I stood still, *he* was there in his old place as usual.

The gas was lit, the boys were all at their

work, he was at the farther end of the room, near the fire-place, his back was towards me, and he was painting his jar of rushes as he had done before. All was so still, so like what it had been, that for one instant a strange feeling came over me, as if I had been dreaming, and I passed my hand over my eyes. Then I looked towards the corner where the wooden pillar stood. The Psyche was gone.

All at once I felt quite calm, calm as if nothing could disturb me. I advanced to the middle of the room. The boys looked up at me with some wonder, no doubt I was pale and haggard enough, as I came thus into the midst of them. But I was able to speak to them quite quietly.

“Boys,” said I, “leave off working, please. I have something to say to you.”

All stopped but one.

He went on with his rushes. I could see the quick sure movement of his hand, the droop of the leaves and stems on his canvas. For one minute I watched him. “Leave off working, Dalton,” I said then, and he stopped

and looked on the ground. The rest all looked at me. Yet for half a minute I was silent, for I found a difficulty in speaking.

"Boys," said I, "did you all go home at the same time last night?"

There was silence.

"Brown, do you know?"

"Most on us, sir, I think," said Brown. "There was Rover stayed to put by the things."

"Rover, can you tell me?"

"I was last, sir, but one," said the boy, with a quick flush, as if he suspected something was wrong.

"I wish to know—because a cruel piece of mischief has been done to me. I wish to find out who did it. Who was last?"

No answer, but all eyes turned in one direction.

"You will not speak to me? Well, I think I know. Dalton, get up, and stand here by me."

He obeyed slowly and came out into the middle of the room with drooping head, but with more courage than I had expected from

him. He looked pale and very tired, the fire of mischief that had been in his eyes for months seemed to have died out at last, and his hands hung listless without twitching now. He stood close to me, trembling a little, and looked down on the ground. I spoke very quietly, I was keeping watch over myself lest my passion should rise.

"Dalton. You broke the Psyche last night?"

There was silence.

"Answer if you please."

"Yes."

The class became breathless.

"Intentionally—of your own wish?"

Silence.

"You wanted to punish me for yesterday—you remembered what I had said about it yesterday?"

Still silence.

"That it was the only thing I cared for—that if I lost that I should have nothing left—you remembered that and chose it for that reason? Answer me?"

"Yes."

Again silence whilst he stood before me, his drooping hands clasped now, and his sallow face turning almost grey, but without lifting his eyes or moving. For that instant I had not breath enough to speak.

“You fiend!” I burst out at last; “for a whole year I have borne with you, and taught you—you whom no other would so much as touch. I have endured your conduct to me, and let you come here day after day, and tried day after day to help you, and now—now that I have given you a little of what you deserve at last, you strike at me as soon as my back is turned like this.”

Again silence. He clasped his hands tighter, and trembled more, but could not look up or speak. I turned to the others.

“Boys,” said I, “you see this fellow? Once you told me he was not fit to be in the class with you. You were right and I was wrong; I see that now. Pah, I won’t touch you. You are not worth touching. Go into the next room, I will give you a letter to your father.”

Still for an instant he stood irresolute,

then turned and went. I trembled lest he should disobey me, for the fierce passion in me was only held back by the very smallest of checks, and I dared not think what might happen—no, his footsteps were in the next room, he had obeyed. A horrible faintness and sickness came over me, I went to the chair near the fire and sat down there with my head in my hands. So I sat without moving till the afternoon was over.

Five o'clock had struck. Six. The boys had all worked in silence. Now they rose, still as if they scarcely dared to move. I was able to raise my head and smile at them.

“This has been a lost day, my lads,” said I; “as far as my teaching is concerned. Well, I will be honest and give you another day in the winter time for this. And now go quietly please. I am rather upset to-day. I have been ill for so many months now.”

It was the first time I had spoken of my illness to them, though no doubt they had heard of it. They looked at me, put their things together with as little noise as possible,

and stole out on tiptoe. Not until the door had closed behind them did I rise. I went then and stood before the picture he had been painting that day.

Drooping rushes and leaves, falling over the canvas, painted as I had taught him, as I could not have done them myself. For he could paint leaves and flowers like an artist even then. I could see the last touches that his hand had made, so graceful, so quickly done, with just one little mistake in the colour of the shadow that I longed to correct as I stood. I stood and gazed, and then all my heart seemed to go out in a bitter cry that I could not help. Oh, why had God granted this genius to *him*? Was there no good lad near at hand whom such a power might have helped? And then I looked towards my Psyche's empty pillar and the strangle of passion overcame me once again. I could feel him writhing in my grasp, shrinking from me—no, I dared not. Once in my youth I had hurt one weaker than myself, I had determined then never so to disgrace my strength again. And I had hurt him yester-

day. But that, nothing, could be an excuse for him. He knew how lonely I was. I turned as soon as I was calm, and went into the next room.

Silence and darkness there. The fire had been lit by the charwoman, but it had sunk to red embers already. And everything else was so still, I thought for an instant he must have gone. No, he was there, far away from the fire, sitting on a form, with his back to the partition wall, his elbows on a table, and his face buried in his hands. Such a slight figure—such delicate, clasping fingers—I paused for a moment, with a feeling almost of pity. Then the rush of passion leaped up to strangle me. Those thin hands, delicate in their beauty like a girl's—those pitiless, cruel hands had touched my Psyche.

He rose as I came near, and stood looking downwards as before—strangely still, as I observed. I dared not look at him.

“Go to the fireplace,” I muttered; “I must write here to your father.”

For I could not have him near me. He went slowly, and I sat down and wrote.

"SIR,

"Your son, in revenge for a punishment I gave him yesterday, has broken with a hammer a bust belonging to me, for which, as he knew, I had a special care and affection. I do not ask for a penny of money in repayment; no money could give it back to me; I only write this that you may understand why I can have him in my class no longer. For the rest I leave his punishment to you.

"JOHN MASON.

"River St., L—,

"Oct. 28th, 18—."

I directed and closed the envelope, then went with it in my hand towards the fireplace. Arce was leaning against the mantle-piece, looking down on the ground. I could see his face now in the dim light; it was white and weary, his eyes, too, were tired and dull, and the very droop of his shoulders seemed to speak of dejection. I had no pity for him, spiritless as he looked, yet for one instant as my glance rested on him it did occur to me, as with a sudden flash of

thought, that after all he might have done what he had done not so much in cold-blooded malice as in sudden madness, from which he was now suffering a sufficiently bitter reaction. That thought came and went in an instant as I approached him. He moved a step away from the fire with an uneasy shuffle as I came near. I looked at him and thought how much I hated him.

“ You will give this letter to your father ? ” said I, with the grating tone in my voice that could make him start—it did make him start then. He took it without a word, and began to move away.

“ And you know, of course,” said I, in the same harsh tone, “ that you will not come back to the class again.”

He stood still for an instant. I thought his lips quivered. Then he went out slowly. Once he looked towards the class-room door—thinking, no doubt, of his picture—but he made no movement towards it, and went on and down the stairs. It was a relief to me to hear the outer door close, and to know myself alone.

Oh, that evening, Jeanie! so lonely, so endless, with such a perpetual sense of hopelessness sinking in it, yet with a dull wretchedness that kept me even from wishing to drink my misery away. I sat on and on by the firelight, not thinking, not reading, only enduring the hours because I knew the longer night was coming. It came at last—I bore it as well as I could. Once I got up from my bed to look at the moonlight on the roofs, but I had to return there again. The hours were endless. At last I lighted my lamp, and lay looking at that. And then, just before the morning, I got a little sleep at last.

I was all ready for the boys this day when they came to me. But the household work had tired me too much: I began to see I must allow myself to be helped now. Still the trouble of it had been good for me, and I had put all things in order. Also I could receive them cheerfully, and could go round to my work with more vigour than before. So we settled to our duties. Only throughout that morning there were two directions in which all eyes would turn—the corner where the

wooden pillar had been, and the corner where the green rushes still drooped on the canvas. I could not bear to see these last, they seemed to gnaw at my heart ; I determined to send them back before the day was over. At least I had done with all scenes now.

But I had not done. The day before had been but the beginning ; this was to prove its sequel.

* * * * *

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and we had been working for nearly two hours, when we heard the tread of a man's footstep on the stairs, accompanied by a sort of shuffle, that it was rather difficult to make out at all. I had looked up curiously, and then, ashamed of my curiosity, had bent again over my work—my back was towards the entrance, but I turned sharply enough when I heard the murmur that ran like a subdued hiss round the class, "Mr. Dalton."

Indeed the presence of any one so notorious in the neighbourhood was exciting. We all seemed to have turned together. He was standing in the entrance.

I

Imagine him. I recall well the appearance of him at that moment. A man of about fifty, short, yet with tolerably broad shoulders, a brown beard, great blue eyes, and a face flushed, as if he had been recently drinking. He had taken off his hat, and his brown hair had a pleasant wave, his half-embarrassed smile brought a sort of shine into his eyes, he had a delicate face, that even the look of habitual intemperance could hardly make coarse. I suppose many people, seeing him thus for the first time, would have pronounced him a "good fellow" at once, and there was, moreover, even in his hesitating manner a refinement to which the neighbourhood was not accustomed. A handsome man—very handsome if he had not been so short—many might have considered him even attractive. But I did not.

He advanced a step into the room, and then we all became aware of some one else in process of being dragged in by the shoulders—Arce, namely, who seemed very far indeed from relishing his position. He was in worse condition than he had ever appeared in my

room before—though that is saying much—his clothes all awry, his black hair loose over his forehead, his face hanging down, and what was to be seen of it, as grey and sallow as possible. Also his eyelids were swollen, though his eyes had something of their old evil fire still, and the tumbled hair did not conceal an ugly bruise on his forehead. I think he was in what is called mortal terror, for he did not resist his father, much as he seemed to dislike his entrance, only all at once, as he was being dragged in, his eyes lightened—he had caught sight of his picture. With one twist then he freed himself from his father's grasp, went up to it, where it stood on the easel, and stood behind it, with one arm hanging over it, as if to protect it. I saw then for the first time that his hands, which he had kept out of view till then, were all bruised and torn—it made me almost sick to look at them.

Mr. Dalton meanwhile had got to the middle of the room and I came to meet him.

“Good-morning to you, Mr. Mason,” said he, still holding his hat in his hand, and with

a little smile and movement of his head.

"Can you spare me a few words just now?"

"Certainly," said I, but still he hesitated, turning his hat from one hand to the other. It was rather a pleasant kind of hesitation, and his manner when he began to speak was engaging enough; he turned his blue eyes full on me now and spoke with frankness.

"I had your letter last night, Mr. Mason," said he, "and I see my blackguard of a boy has been getting into trouble again. A precious trick that after you had been so good to him! Well, I don't know rightly the worth of what he's done. They say such things are worth a deal, but I have brought all I can. Will that, do you think, be better than nothing?" and he held out half-a-sovereign and sixpence in his outstretched palm.

"Thank you," said I, "I want nothing at all."

"But I should like you to take it," said he. "Do take it now. Well, I came here to give that to you, and to ask you too what you would like me to do about this youngster here. I did give him a bit of a thrashing,

as you see, last night; but that was because I could get nothing out of him at first about it. I brought him crying to his knees though at last. And now, what shall I do to him?"

"Nothing," said I.

"Nothing?"

"He has been punished. Let him be."

"Well, if you will have it so. But there is one thing more I have to say to him though."

"And what is that?"

"Wait a moment. Mr. Mason, you will take this money here?"

"Indeed I cannot."

"I wish you would though."

"I cannot. The thing had no money-value to me, a friend left it who is dead. One can't buy a memory."

"And that one can't," said Dalton. "Well, you won't have it?"

"I cannot. What have you to say?"

"Just this, since you won't, though I wish you would. Mr. Mason, and the rest of you, you see this fellow here?"

We all turned our eyes at once upon Arce

whose head sunk in response as if it would drop into his breast.

"Look at him," said the father, "shrinking and cowering like a coward as he is. Mr. Mason, you don't know the torment that fellow has been to me, a serpent's brat, always in some plague or other, there is no bringing him up at all. And he gets me into all these plagues too. Well, I've this to say now, I'm tired of him, I will bear it no longer. He may find his home somewhere else for me. I told him I would say this as we came along, and I do so now before Mr. Mason and all of you. I've given him up. He shan't come back to any house of mine, I'll give him no bit or sup more to support him, nor roof over his head either, he may go to the devil to whom he belongs."

"Mr. Mason," said a small boy, "may I shut the window?"

It had been left open because the fire smoked. But heavy clouds had been gathering silently all the morning, and now turning we saw that the snow was drifting fast inside, the first snow of the year. I went and

closed the window and returned. Something in the sudden darkness, the bleak look of the falling flakes had struck us all and we were quiet. Dalton too had observed, he looked at the street, then at his son, and a sort of smile rose on his lips.

"Ah!" he said, "you may find your shelter there."

Then Arce raised his head. His eyes were blazing (they could look like that when he was excited), and his words came fast and wildly.

"I don't care," he said, "what is it to me? That won't hurt me?" and here his breath was caught by the sharp, dry cough that came to him at times in the winter. His father heard it.

"Ah!" he said quite quietly, "you won't last long in the snow, but you'll find no honest man as'll give you a shelter now."

"My father won't," said Brown the righteous.

"No, nor none of us," echoed Rover, for the sympathies of all the class had been with me the day before. Then there was a short silence.

"So, you see," said Dalton, still addressing his son, "but you've got friends enough I know, I needn't be afraid for you. Gallows Jack and his crew 'll keep you warm enough. You'll go to them now, maybe."

The boy had dropped his head again, but he raised it at these words, and there came over his lips the strangest smile, a smile that I pray God I may never see on such a young face again. It made us all still for the moment. I had not been speaking, the tumult in me was too great for that, but I stepped forward now.

"Dalton," said I, with a jerk of my thumb towards the window, "how will you live when you get out there?"

"I don't know."

"What will be the end of you do you think?"

"I don't care."

"Ah! Mr. Dalton, will you mind keeping this lad of yours here for a few minutes? I shall have something to say to him when I return, excuse me now," and I strode out leaving the class to wonder.

Up and down, round and round my bedroom, the furniture was all pushed aside to give me room to move. My head was in a tumult, my brain whirled, surging waters seemed round me, and I dared not be still. I think I have never known such moments as those, so troubled, so overwhelmed, and yet at the same time though I could not be still to consider. There were parts of my consciousness that would still be uppermost, coming and going like waves on a stormy sea, my hatred, my resentment, my repulsion, the young life so near to destruction, the young talent, genius it might be, turned out to perish in the streets, or worse, to sink in the low vices and despicable crimes in which no such fire of God can live. They seemed a reality to me, the dark waters, and I and he were alone there. My mind was in a tumult, I could not leave him to perish. I could not think, yet I decided, maybe (though I scarce asked for help), it was decided for me.

I went back quickly.

The class seemed not to have moved since

I had left. I had been gone ten minutes by my watch. The boys were sitting idle and breathless before their work. Dalton stood in the middle of the room, Arce behind his painting. They all turned their eyes on me. I came in and spoke at once, lest my courage should fail.

“Mr. Dalton,” said I, “I must ask your pardon for keeping you waiting so long; but I have a proposal to make to you. You tell me you have given up the charge of your son. I don’t blame you for that, but I can’t bear, either, to think that anyone I have taught should go to ruin so; and, though he is a bad lad, he is clever at his painting. Well, I have one thing to say—I have not forgiven him for what he has done to me. I shall NEVER forget it; he has hurt me too much for that. But then he has left me nothing else to hurt; if he were to try he could not injure me again. And so, if he likes, he may have one chance more. I can’t have him again in the class with the others—I could not bear that; but I have been wanting a long time to have a lad to live with me and run my

errands, for I am too ill for work myself. I couldn't give him any money—not a penny—but he might have food and lodging, and lessons when I had time, so he might perhaps find it worth his while just at present; and if he tries any of his tricks on the others in the house (he can't hurt me) I would just turn him out on the streets and have done with him, or else I would keep him a year, that is all. He may do this if he likes, and it might perhaps save him; but I can't forgive him.

“Do you hear *that*?” asked Dalton.

He spoke in a low voice; he seemed excited and confused, and his eyes glanced in a troubled fashion at me. All his old manner was gone. The boys, too, seemed struck with sudden awe, as if they had been frozen together. Only Arce, standing still with drooping head behind his picture, remained unchanged.

“I do mean it,” said I.

“*Well*, Mr. Mason,” said the father, with a deep breath and a sort of quiver in his voice, “it's real good of you, it is. I don't

understand it." It was strange to see *him* moved. "Well, I should be only too glad—that's all—then."

"Not quite," said I. "What does the boy say?"

There was no answer.

"Speak at once, you beast!" said his father.

Still no answer.

"What do you say?" asked I, forcing myself to look at him.

His eyes lifted themselves for an instant towards mine, then dropped, whilst his feet shuffled on the ground.

"I—I can't," he said, with a sob.

"You can't?"

No answer.

"You can't, or you won't?"

"I—can't."

"Now, look here," said his father, "if you"—

"Stop," said I; "let him speak for himself. And be quiet, you," for the class were beginning to talk as well. "Arce," said I, addressing him once for all, and forcing

myself to look steadily at him now, "this is the last time I can speak to you on this subject. It's like enough you mayn't like my offer—there is nothing grand in it for anyone; but if you have only to choose between that and the companions your father spoke of and their ways, which are bad enough in the beginning and lead to hell in the end, even this might be best for you. Is that so? I can't give you any liking or respect, but I can offer you an honest home and work, and that's about all I can do. If you were anyone else, I might say to you that here was a time to mend and do better for the past, but I don't suppose that, being what you are, you care for such things as these. Well, think now, and tell me, when you have thought, what you have decided."

He had raised his eyes, and looked attentively at me whilst I spoke, in much the same way, only more intense, as that in which he used to follow my words when I was teaching him. When I had done he let his head drop downwards again, and seemed to consider; only I could tell that he was very much

excited, for when the class began to murmur he first started, and then, putting out his elbows horizontally, pressed his knuckles on his breast to keep himself from crying. Mr. Dalton stood still in the middle of the room, looking on the ground and fidgeting with his hat. The boys, after I had looked at them, were quiet. So passed some while. He let his elbows drop at last.

“You will, or you will not?” said I. He looked up, but his lips trembled too much for him to speak. “For the last time, you will?” He made the very slightest movement with his head. I think he could not have spoken then, but that was enough. “Very well then,” said I; “go home and tell your mother.”

“And mind you,” said his father, catching him by the shoulder, “look that you’re gone before I return at night, or it will be worse for you.”

Arce glanced up at him with eyes that blazed again, so close was his passion even then; but the next instant he had clutched at his breast with his hands, and in that

manner, and with his head hanging, shuffled from the room. Mr. Dalton stayed yet a while, offered the money again, and at last held out his hand to me. I am afraid I hurt him by waiting a moment before I took it, but I could hardly help that. He smiled graciously at me as he left. I never saw him again, nor did I wish to do so, but the remembrance of him is strong in my mind to-day. The remembrance of his pitiful death is there also, or I should have stronger words for what I mean. I never saw a man who repelled me more—so handsome, frank, generous, even on the surface, and beneath, and only just beneath, such a cold-blooded prodigal; mean, selfish, rotten to the heart's core did he seem to me. May God forgive him if my thoughts of him were true! The boys and I did our work for the rest of the morning; then they went and left me alone to think.

And now, Jeanie, you may wish to know what my thoughts were—you whom the morning's work must have left in doubt as to whether I was most of a lunatic or a

Christian. Well, I will try to tell you, and I will speak freely, whether you think the worse of me or not. I did not repent what I had done; my purpose held. I had always had for the boy a strange sort of fascination, strange to me because so much repulsion, and even fear, could be mingled with it. I had that still. Then I had spoken truth when I had said that there seemed nothing of mine or me that he could hurt to any sort of purpose now, and for the other lodgers, I was not afraid for them, for their ways were such that I would have had no decent lad in the house with me at all. Then, too, I thought he had splendid talent, and hoped to gain some future profit for myself by directing it; and then—and most strongly of all did this thought come—my bitterness lay gnawing and keen-toothed at my heart, it would have made me miserable to think that he might yet go out into the world and be happy. I knew enough of his sensitiveness, of my power, to feel well that if he were with me I could make him know every day, every hour in every day, that it was he,

and none other, who had hurt my Psyche. That thought fed my madness, but it soothed it too, and it needed soothing.

Jeanie, I can tell all these bad reasons of mine to you, and indeed they came uppermost with me. Something more there must have been, but that was weaker and more indistinct. I can tell the worst. For the rest, I think now, and it has always seemed to me, that when the night of my worst need came the Lord would have left me alone to perish in the streets of London if I had not shown mercy to the lad that day.

CHAPTER VII.

I SPENT that afternoon—there was a cricket match, and it was a holiday—alone in my arm-chair by the fire, too tired then to think or to do anything but listen vaguely to the noises in the streets outside. I had dined earlier than usual. One o'clock struck—two, three, still I was alone. It came over me all at once, as I sat there, that I might have to remain alone. That startled me, and I sat up to think.

Three o'clock. The short winter afternoon seemed to be getting dark already, and a cold mist had risen from the river and dimmed the windows. Everything seemed lonely, only there was the noise of a man swearing loudly in the street outside. It was not snowing, but the clouds were gathering heavily—it would snow again soon. Where was Arce? More than three hours had passed since he left me. Did he intend to come at all?

A burning shame flushed my face all at once. The scene of the morning came into

my mind, ridiculous, mock-pathetic ; if it all were to come to nothing at last ? And then, too, there was a terror on me. I had been so wretched alone the night before, I began to feel that even a hated companion might be better than none ; I could not spend another evening alone. At any rate I must see the end of this. A quarter-past three. I started up, though it was snowing, and got my hat. Then, when I was ready, my unconscious footsteps took me to the schoolroom : I looked in to give the last glance as usual to my Psyche. Then I turned away hastily, the strangle rising in my throat again. There was a pleasant fire in the schoolroom ; my arm-chair was near it. I was in a rage with myself for going, but my misery would not let me sit still, and I went.

Gas-lit streets, falling snow, trumpery in cheap shops, people within and without who looked at me in amazement when I asked where Pleasant Place could be. Then a wretched public-house ; I had sought out the Ranter at last, and the Ranter came reeling towards me in the doorway, too tipsy to

speaking. Then a whole string of directions from a young girl, white and pinched, poor thing, with a baby on her bosom; then losing my way; then another string of directions from a boy who could whistle, and so on through the snow and the darkness.

Pleasant Place at last. A dingy court reached by a dark alley; dingy falling houses all round it, dropping roofs, windows stuffed with paper and rags, and a noise of singing and swearing through open doorways. I inquired at the first house where the Daltons lived, but the man there was drunk and could not tell me. I inquired at the second house, but the woman there was drunk and could not tell me. I inquired at the third. A little girl came to the door there with a broom in her hand—

“Dalton. Oh, yes; and Mrs. Dalton ’ad ’ired ’er, and was upstairs.”

Upstairs I went.

A little bedroom, poor but neat; three small mattresses in a row against one wall; opposite, its side almost touching their ends, a small iron bedstead. One little window

gave light. A lovely child, with her tumbled fair hair falling over her shoulders, was playing with a kitten on the nearest mattress; a little bare-footed boy sat on the floor; crouching by the bedstead was a young woman—or so she looked to be—and lying on it Arce, with his arms round her neck and his head on her shoulder. They looked up as I came to the open door. He let go of her hastily, and turned away with his face to the wall. She rose and came to meet me.

“Mrs. Dalton.”

“Yes, sir; you are Mr. Mason?”

“Yes.”

After a little pause—“It’s good of you, sir, to come here. I hear from Andrew that he has been a very bad boy, and that you have been good to him.”

I made no answer to that.

“Will you like to sit down here, sir?”—and then remembering perhaps that there was no chairs in the room—“or to go downstairs.”

“I will go downstairs, if you please,” said I.

"Get out of the way with you," said Mrs. Dalton to the youngest boy, and she led the way downstairs.

"Sally, go up and look after the children," she said, and then she found a chair and placed it for me.

She had very pretty, simple manners. The room below was not clean and tidy like that above; there were marks of dirty boots on the floor, and the air was stifled with the smell of stale tobacco. Also recent washing had been done, there was a great tub in the corner, and damp, warm steam was in conflict with the frosty air that came in sharply through the broken panes. Mrs. Dalton stood by me. She was pretty; must have been very pretty when she was younger. Her hair was soft and smooth, her eyes blue and gentle, and her figure almost as slight as a girl's, even now. Also her dress was tolerably neat. Her face was white, worn, and faded; her cheeks sunken, her expression hopelessly weary, patient still, but despairing. Her voice when she spoke low had a pleasantness in it; and her manner, as I said before, was

pleasing. But she looked worn out with misery.

"I'm sure, sir, I'm ashamed of this room," she said. "But I've not had time to clean and tidy to-day, with the pain in my side bad too. Dalton, when he's out, I do the washing here. And my husband's friends come in at all times, there's no keeping a thing clean down below. I'm sure I do my best. But last night I was up all night."

Suddenly, and clasping her hands, "Oh, sir, take Andrew away from here—take him—and I'll give you a mother's blessing with all the heart I have. It might just save him, and he'll die or get bad here, there's no help for him."

She had spoken with sudden passion, and the tears ran down her face.

"I tell you," said I, rather surly, for the cold and snow were in my bones then, "I have promised to have him, it's his own doing that he is not in my house now. If he wants to come he may come. I can't say more than that."

"Then he may come—this evening, sir,"

she interrupted me. "He's most afraid—afraid, you know. But I should like him to get away before his father come back. His father do beat him so, and I can't think it's good for him."

I noticed then, for the first time, that she had a bruise on her forehead too.

"He's not all bad—Andrew isn't," she went on after awhile whilst her tears dropped. "But no one 'll think so but me. And they drive him, and plague him, and make him that wild amongst them that he doesn't know rightly what he's doing more times than one. I can't help liking him a little; he's my son, you know. And if he might get away from here I sometimes think he might do better, though he's daft-like in all things, and not strong like others. I dare-say, sir, you've found him hard to teach?"

"It's his temper only that makes him hard to teach," said I, grimly enough. "But we won't speak of him," for I felt my brows clouding.

"No, sir, we won't," said she, timidly hurrying away from the subject. "Might I

offer you some tea? I'll send out for some at once—I could get some.”

“No, no, I must be going. And tell your lad to come to me. I wish, for your sake, he was a better one.”

“Yes, sir,” submissively. “At what time shall he be coming?”

“At six o'clock,” I answered at random.

“Yes; I am afraid his clothes”—

“Don't mind about them.”

“God bless you, sir.”

She put her apron to her eyes and I took that opportunity to depart. But before I could shut the door she had reached it, and stood watching me as I went down the court, a pretty slight figure with a sad woman's face above. The other neighbours also came to their door to stare. So I left.

The snow had turned to sleet which the wind drove in gusts along the streets; and snow, rain, and darkness soon hid from my sight the deeper blackness of the alley from which Pleasant Place was entered.

Six o'clock had come and passed. A few minutes later—I was sitting as usual in my

armchair by the fire—I heard a hesitating step on the stairs. Then he entered my room. And as I rose it came on me suddenly like a blow, the thought of how my life was about to be changed. I had not realised that before.

He stood by the door, his head hanging, his arms hanging, a little bundle in his hand. Tall, slight as a girl, his sallow face twitching, his feet shuffling, his short, black eyelashes hiding his eyes—an odd contorted figure—this lad I hated so much. Mine—my chosen companion for a year—I could scarcely understand it. And for that whole year never to be alone from him. Well, I would do what I could.

“Come in, come to the fire,” said I, for I had determined not to be cruel to him. “Sit down there in my chair, for I must go to my room for a few minutes.”

Indeed I felt as if I could not bear his presence. He sat down, blue and trembling with cold, trembling too with more than cold, as if he could scarcely hold himself upright at all. Yet as he looked at the fire there

came a sort of relaxed expression on his face —there had been no fire in his own home that day. I left him there and went to my bedroom.

After a few minutes I had got over the feeling of nervousness and sickness that had almost overcome me, and was able to return to him. He was crouching over the fire drawing in his breath so as to make little soft sounds of pleasure. When I came in he stood up, white and shaking so that he could scarcely support himself on his feet. What was I to do with such a creature?

“Come to your room,” said I, and he followed me.

His room was a little affair with a roof of its own opening out on to the stairs, for there were all sorts of such ways and means in the house. Beneath was an outhouse. It was but a few feet square, had a sloping, rickety ceiling, a mattress bed, and a jug and basin on a chair, but it might have been a palace itself to judge by the way in which he looked at it. I daresay, judging from previous experience, he had thought that he must sleep

with me and all the other lodgers as well. I left him there, telling him I would call him when I wanted him, and went back to my sitting-room, glad to be rid of him for a while.

Sitting in my arm-chair, doubled up with pain and fatigue, I tried to think once more. Already at noon I had had a furious fight with my landlady, and had been forced to buy her compliance. He would cost me a great deal of trouble before I had done with him. What would the end of it be?

I set the tea myself, and made it before I called him. The little square table—that had no settled place in the room—had been moved, as usual, up to the rug, and I had fetched in a chair from my bedroom. That was opposite me, for I could not bear to have him next me. There he sat with his head on his hand, scarcely raising it to eat or drink at all, the big bruise on his forehead more easily to be seen now. When I had done I made him take his chair to the fireside, whilst I cleared everything away, for still I could not endure not to do everything for myself,

and indeed he looked almost too ill to move. Then I set my arm-chair on the other side of the fire opposite him, and we began our long evening together.

A long evening indeed it was. Neither of us spoke. I had put out the gas, for I was too ill that night to work, and only the firelight, burning and crackling, shone for us both. He had taken the three-legged stool, and sat leaning against the mantelpiece and looking on the ground, casting a deep shadow on one side of him. Now and then, after drowsy intervals (for the doctor had sent me some narcotic stuff that day), it would seem dreamily to me as if he were one of those queer visions that the firelight can create—quite as grotesque, and only a little more substantial—and then, in clearer thoughts, when it came to me that it was I whom he had injured who was giving him food and warmth—comfort and relief perhaps too—I felt as if I hated him more and more. Only once did I speak. The logs on the fire—one of my pupils had paid me in logs—were almost burnt out, and I felt too ill to get

up. I signed to him, therefore, to take one from the basket near. As he held the heavy, knotted bit of wood in his hand, his eyes rested on it for a moment with a curious, frowning glance, and he shrugged his shoulders as if he were in pain. I observed that.

“Arce,” said I, suddenly, after he had sat wearily down again, “does your father beat you with that?”

He gave no answer.

“Do you hear me?”

“No,” said he, slowly and sulkily, “with the leg of a chair that has nails in it.”

I sat silent, pondering over this new instrument of correction.

“Has he hurt you much?”

No answer.

“Let’s see,” said I, going over to him.

But the next instant I was almost sorry I had looked. His mother had sewn and mended up his jacket till it looked pretty decent, but beneath were but rags, and beneath these again what I should not care to describe to you. For one instant I felt sick and indignant that any one could touch a

sickly lad in such a manner; then a sort of fierce joy overflowed in me.

"It does not matter," said I. "He could not give you worse than you deserve."

He made no reply.

So the long evening passed. Sitting silent on either side of the fire we heard the clock below strike ten at last. He raised his head for a moment, but I did not move; indeed I was considering. It seemed to me better that we should understand each other before our year's trial should begin. I had begun to be afraid of mistakes. A fierce anger was struggling in me too, and with it the wish that he also should understand in some measure what lay before him; he might so easily think better or worse of me than I deserved; yet it was difficult to speak.

"Arce," I said at last, and he looked up.

"I want to tell you—I think you ought to know"—I began, and stopped half-choked. Then the words came fast and grimly enough. "You know what you did to me?"

"Yes."

"Do you think I have forgiven you?"

His eyes drooped, and he made no answer.

"*You know*," said I. "Well, I want you to believe that I do not mean for all that to treat you badly. I'll give you food and clothes, and teach you to paint, and do my duty honest by you whilst you stay with me; and I shan't punish you either as your father does—it's nought to me if you go wrong—only if you get too bad to be borne with, and tell lies always, or hurt the other lodgers, you'll have to go, that's all; and as for your work"—he looked up eagerly—"it's little of that you'll be able to do just yet. Look at your hands; you can't even paint with them; you'll have to eat and be idle." His head had sunk, and his lips quivered. "Get to bed, and stay there to-morrow morning; if you're ill on my hands it will be worse still, you know. You mean to obey me, I suppose?" for he had hesitated. "Now go," and he went.

Long did I crouch on the rug before the fire after he had gone, looking into its red eyes as if to find the future there—long, till midnight had struck at last from the clock

below. Heathen that I was, I had no idea of wrong, nor feared, tired out with pain and fatigue at last, to go prayerless to bed. Two o'clock had struck before I could sleep. The year I was to spend with him had begun, and its first evening was over.

Well, I must be quicker now. To what end should I moralise? Yet there are things I might say; you shall say them for yourself, and I will tell the rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

LET me begin then. Next morning the boys all came at their usual time, and I was able to get through my work quietly as before. The days passed with little enough to mark them ; I was teaching almost all day, and painting hard with my left hand when I was not. Of Arce I saw scarce anything except at meal-times, and during the long evenings when he sat opposite me on his three-legged stool, white and languid as at first. I would not let him work or move, or take a paint-brush into his hand, for I meant to do my duty after all, and his sickliness alarmed me. The other boys were very impatient and curious, as I could see, but he kept out of their way. He never spoke to me if he could help it, nor I to him ; so the days passed for us.

On Monday evening—he had come to me on a Wednesday—I stopped him as he was stealing quietly off to bed and told him that

he must get up early the next morning and begin his work with me. He said not a word—the whole time he lived with me he never did answer if he could help it—but the next day, when I came down in the dark and lit the gas, he was there in the sitting-room waiting, blue and trembling with cold. Then I would not let him work, but made him follow me as I went round, laid the fire, set the room in order, and finally got out and arranged my work for the day. When that was done, and all was ready, before it was time for breakfast, I fetched the little table from my painting-room, set it under one of the windows to catch the morning sun, arranged on it a bundle of sticks in a red cloth, and told him to paint. Then I went to work on some old drawings of mine, for I had some orders now. After breakfast I left him at his painting as before, and went to teach. So our real life began.

Looking back now, I can see those old times; I can see him bending over his work as I come in and out of the class-room, or sitting opposite to me and silent at meals, or

on his three-legged stool in the evenings, with his head leaning against the mantelpiece and his forehead twitching with pain. Through all the day there was no escape from him; in my painting-room even I knew he was close at hand, and if he went out into the streets, which he did very rarely, I had always to expect his return. His mother never came to see him then, nor any of his family; they seemed content to leave him to me.

Do you ask me how I could bear that constant companionship? Well, well enough. It could not be helped, and my Psyche-vision, still close to me, kept me in a dull grief and pain that was not inclined for outbursts. Then he was very quiet—too quiet—I could not make him out at all. Sometimes, in the long evenings, when I would see him sitting with his elbows on his knees looking at me from under his eyebrows, a sort of fear would come to me. He seemed so stupid that he could scarcely hear when I spoke to him, so ill and nervous that there was no trusting the smallest work to him, and I did almost

everything myself. He had no ideas either of being tidy or even clean, the shuffling of his feet annoyed me, and his hand used to shake sometimes till he could scarcely lift a plate without rattling it; but I bore all this rather than take the trouble of correcting him, only sometimes it seemed to me as if I were in companionship with a strange sort of an animal rather than with a human being at all. We held very little communication with each other; it seemed to me that at the end of the year we might know no more of each other than at the beginning.

What did he think all this while? What were his feelings during those long evenings when he sat crouched up near the fire and silent? For the year that had begun for me had begun also for him. I could not tell, I had no clue to his thoughts, and he gave no word to tell them to me. The deep repugnance in my heart towards him seemed to warn me, but at any rate he was outwardly submissive, and that was all I cared for from him. So December passed.

Two odd things happened in the beginning

of January which took from me the two steadiest and best of all my pupils in the class. These were the marriage of Brown, and the sudden improvement in the prospects of Rover. They happened in this manner.

Mr. Brown—for so he called himself when his marriage was consummated—had been taking his solitary walk abroad one day in December, when he perceived a young lady—for so *she* called herself—engaged in the same amusement with a friend. This young lady—she was a milliner's 'prentice with flaxen ringlets—did greatly captivate the heart of *Mr.* Brown (a sober, steady lad of nineteen as ever I knew), and he addressed his steps to walk as close behind her as possible. The young lady, perceiving this, took the opportunity accidentally to drop her glove, and when *Mr.* Brown had picked it up they found themselves able to walk together without any other sort of introduction at all. Brown was an ardent lover; he called the same night on her father (the keeper of a public-house), and made his proposals in due form. These were accepted on condition that the next day

he should be able to show some prospect of an income, for he had none. The next morning he spent at the foundry, where he was well known, as was also his father, and as he had good skill in mechanical drawing, and other work required, it was finally agreed upon that he should receive what was nearly a man's pay, provided, poor lad, that he should prove himself equal to a man's labour. This being once settled, the rest was not long in coming to a conclusion also, and one morning in January, as he sat over his drawing (a tall, sober-looking, dark-haired boy he was), he looked up with a faint blush and informed me quite quietly that his lessons must now end, as his wedding was the next day. I had not heard a word of the affair before, nor did what he told me satisfy me much. However, I did the best I could, shook hands with him, and begged him, married or single, to come to me and have a lesson whenever he had an afternoon to spare.

So we parted.

Rover was not long in following. And his story was romantic too. He was waiting

about for errands in the street one day when a lady coming out of a shop dropped the glove she was just putting on, and he picked it up and gave it to her. That or his blue eyes interested her, she asked him many questions, and seemed surprised ("like as if she would cry," said Rover), when she heard of the curate who befriended him. Perhaps she had an interest in *him*. Anyhow, a few days after, Rover had an invitation from the rich aunt with whom the young lady lived to become a page in her household.

A page ! That I could not grasp for a long while. Rover, dear fellow, was the most good-natured boy I ever knew, clever too in all manner of aimless directions, and handsome enough except for the mark on his face that the pot of beer had made. But he had been hungry, knocked about, half-starved, used to streets and public-houses all his life ; how he was to transform himself into a page I could not tell.

The thing was settled however, the curate provided him with an outfit, and one dark, snowy winter afternoon he came and took

almost a tearful leave of me and the others. When he had done he still stood fidgeting from one foot to the other, and twisting his hands, whilst a deep flush rose on his face, I think he was thinking of one good-bye he had not said.

He could not summon up courage to speak to me however, and went.

The curate, his patron, was married that same January to a grocer's daughter. And the shoemaker gave up at last the idea that his son would turn out a genius, and set him to making shoes instead. Some others in my class went; some new ones came. I paid not much heed. The dark winter passed like a dull, painful dream, and I and my wolf's cub lived alone together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE days passed quietly enough with Arce and me. But though he was always submissive to me, we were not allowed to live long alone in peace. The neighbourhood had become suspicious and my landlady quarrelsome. After a while the first storm came.

I was coming back one Saturday from some shopping and had just reached the house-door, when I heard the most fearful outbreak within. Oaths there were, the piercing tones of a woman's voice, screams and threats, with the noise of struggling and tramping on the floor.

Such things were not altogether uncommon in the house, but they had never been heard in my rooms before. I hastened upstairs. There in the sitting-room were Mrs. Smith and Arce, she had pinned him by her size and weight into a corner, he had snatched up a knife—I thank God indeed that I did get back in time.

Yet, for a while, even though they saw me,

they continued their quarrel, their voices rising one against each other, until I commanded them to be quiet in tones that must have been heard out in the country, I should think. Then little by little, I made out the story, not without difficulty, for Arce would deny with many oaths one instant what he would confess to the next.

Still, between the two, I arrived at the truth at last. He had knocked over my jug of beer, as indeed the floor gave witness, and in a great fright had snatched up some pence on the table and gone to the nearest public-house to buy some more.

The pence were indeed mine, but had been laid there for Mrs. Smith ; finding them gone she supposed the boy had robbed her and on his return had attacked him.

I gave her what I owed her and a little more, and sent her away. Then I looked at Arce who stood before me, not passionate now, but pale and trembling and hanging his head as if I were about to turn him into the streets at once. It was his first offence since he had lived with me.

"Arce," said I pretty sternly, for his shrinking annoyed me, "you told me with a tolerable amount of curses just now that it was not you who knocked over the beer."

He looked up at me in something of his old manner, with the sulky glare in his eyes.

"Answer me," said I.

"Yes," said he at once.

"And you swore you did not take the pence."

"Yes."

"And that Mrs. Smith had taken them."

"Yes."

"And that you never went out into the streets."

"Yes."

"And that you never touched a knife, though I saw you with one."

"Yes."

"Very well," said I after a pause, "there are five lies at once, all told together. And you took the pence, which even if they had been mine, were not yours to touch. Now I would have you to know one thing, it is that

I detest thieves much, and liars even more. Do you understand me?"

He looked at me and then burst out into tears. I was so astonished that I moved away. But when I had gone a few steps I stopped.

"How many more lies will you tell me before I have done with you?" I asked looking at him.

"None—none," he answered sobbing.

"I don't believe you," said I and walked away.

But he had spoken truth; he never told me another to my knowledge during all the time he lived with me.

Another outbreak soon followed. The neighbours were suspicious, they sent me warning anonymous letters on dangerous characters, and soon proceeded to more active measures.

One dark winter evening, as I stood at the window, I saw Arce coming down the street, wearily as usual. He stopped under a gaslamp and stood thinking, as it seemed to me, for his face was full of thoughts as it

often was when he fancied himself alone. I was annoyed and wished he would make more haste, for it was late, and some boys were collecting behind him.

All at once a handful of mud was thrown at his face. He started, picked up a sharp, heavy stone that had been left by some accident on the pavement, and flung it straight at the others. Of course, a shower of stones followed (the road had been mended that day). He lost his wits, staggered up against the house, and stood. I ran down, caught hold of him, and dragged him in, the rest pelting us with stones the whole length of the way. Only when I got to my rooms could we look at each other. He was pale and panting, trembling with terror all over, but he had not been hurt. I had a great cut on my forehead that a stone had made.

“Look there,” said I pointing to it, “that is another thing I shall owe to you.”

He looked down and his lips moved, but he said not a word. Nor did we speak of the matter again. I had many threatening letters at that time, but I thank God no

dread of personal violence has ever been able to turn me aside from what I wanted to do. We lived on silently together.

One morning in the middle of January, coming down late (a short sleep having succeeded a long night), I found that the fire was lighted. I had scarcely allowed him till then to touch any work at all, partly because he was so nervous when I was present, and partly too because I hated so much to see his hands on anything. That day however, it was a great comfort to me to find that the work was done. The next morning I was late again, the fire was lighted again. From that time he was always down first and did that work for me.

Well, how foolish I am! all this must seem so trifling to you. How little I thought then that the time would come when I would treasure up all these remembrances as a woman treasures the jewels of long past days. Even now sometimes when I shut my eyes, or when I am dreaming at night I can be back in those old times; I am in my wooden chair by the fire, and he is moving in

the room, or sitting bent over his painting near me with the light in his eyes or that curious entreating look in them when he raises them to me.

I paid no heed to that then, I disliked him, I thought he disliked me, and I gave him little credit for being not only knave but hypocrite as well. However, as I could not bear to live two months with him in his first condition I had begun to teach him before February came, had made him cut his nails and his hair, had given him new clothes, and tied up all his old rags in a bundle. He looked less like a wild animal when these things were done, though he had still always a hunted, frightened appearance, as if he were about to be pursued, and knew that he deserved to be punished—his eyes would shrink or dilate and his knees would tremble, and now and then in the evenings he would sit staring into the fire in a sort of abstraction in which he would look scarcely conscious of any outward circumstances at all.

His painting, at which he worked hard and untiringly, seemed often beautiful to me, the

skill and power of it grew daily, I would sometimes look at him as he looked at the fire, and wonder what sort of a future lay before him. For that the years might bring him but a commonplace life, even the life of an ordinary artist, did not even seem possible to me.

Yet, I had for him still that dull dislike with which I began. I taught him with all my might, but I was always hard with him, notwithstanding. His future success would after all mean nothing to me, and my Psyche was gone.

Ah, well, Rover came back again that spring, having apparently not succeeded as a page. The curate and his wife befriended him (she was a good woman, though I could never understand why she wore yellow stockings) and gave him employment in their house as before. Whenever he had time he would come up and draw. And sometimes when passing from one room to another he would look towards the young face bent over its painting always alone, and nod and smile at it without going nearer. Arce never took

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any notice of these greetings, but perhaps he liked them notwithstanding.

I saw Mrs. Dalton once before the winter was over. She asked me to come up to her house, and I promised to do so when I had time. There was one other circumstance, too, I must not forget, for I had some reason to remember it afterwards. Arce was sitting opposite to me one day at dinner when he looked up suddenly and spoke. I think he must have forgotten himself in his eagerness at that moment, for he had never done such a thing before.

“Mr. Mason,” he said, “I saw a little girl this morning who was like my sister.”

“Oh! you did?” said I, indifferently, for I was thinking of other matters, and he shrank back into silence again.

So the spring came. On the dull green water beneath my house the sunlight glinted with cheerier sparkles; the reflections of the old houses in it were brighter, and the few dingy trees in the back garden put on tender young leaves again—spring gives such a curious youthfulness to trees. It was cold,

raw weather, however, more pinching even than winter; such gusts used to come down the street that the crazy houses by the river tottered before them, and the leaves had been so long in coming out that one got at last quite weary of watching for them; still they came. The boys used to come to the class with primroses in their buttonholes, and now and then a cowslip or two. In a field close by the dirty children of the neighbourhood scrambled about for flowers, and one or two poor people tried to think they needed their fires no longer. The Ranter, in a very pitiful and helpless condition after some triumph at a public-house, fell over into the river one day, caught his head against the corner of a bridge, and was carried off to the nearest hospital. From thence he was sent to a hospital in some distant town, stayed there a week or two till he was well, then left altogether. I never heard of him again. Rover's curate had some prospect of a living, and his wife set herself up in silk gowns immediately. Then the prospect failed, and there was a great commotion with tradespeople, but the

affair was settled. So the spring went on.

It had been going on, and even trying a little to be warm for some time when I went to see Mrs. Dalton. Pleasant Place looked more wretched than ever. There was more light on it now, but the light only made its wretchedness more visible. Drunken men tottered about, miserable women brawled and shook their fists at each other. The rain was drizzling fast on the court-yard, but some children, with very little clothing amongst them, were sprawling notwithstanding in the mud. Yet Mrs. Dalton, when she came to her door to receive me, looked neat and gentle; and though her face was haggard, her hair was soft and smooth as ever. She was very thin and worn. Again there was a mark on her cheek as if she had been lately struck, and a little baby lay in her arms. She asked me to come in. The whole house was in confusion. She fell down on a chair and burst out crying. I did not know what to say to her. After a little while she revived, took the baby upstairs, and came down again.

composed. Then she moved about the things till they were almost tidy, set the kettle on the fire, made some tea for me, and waited on me as prettily as if she had been born a lady. When we had done eating and drinking (she had some dry crusts, which did well enough for her and me) she drew her chair to my side, and listened patiently whilst I spoke to her of her son. But she seemed scarcely to have spirit enough to care what happened to him. When I had done, for I did not say much, she remained for some while silent with her hand pressed against her cheek. I saw then what a thin hand it was; how wasted was the cheek against which it rested. She spoke wearily at last.

“I’m sure, sir, you’re very good,” she said. “And I am glad to hear it. But Dalton he’s that bad I don’t seem to mind for anything. And I’m glad you’ve got Andrew, for I always thought he would come to bad, and he mayn’t quite so soon now. And I’ve met him once or twice in the street, but I daren’t let him come home, though he’d like to, for fear of his father. And I think he’s

fatter nor he was. But I don't like him to be here; you see yourself, sir, that it's not a fit place for anyone. And I don't see what for I've got such a life given to me as this. I'm sure I'm no worse than others, nor as bad. I try to do my duty by him as is with me, but it's no good at all, he's as bad as ever he can be, my husband is; and I don't know what the Lord means by it all." Again, and with a little moan, "It's the Lord's doing, they say; I don't understand it myself."

"Mrs. Dalton," said I.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you married to your husband?"

She sprang to her feet, a red spot glowed on each cheek; she turned on me as if she could have struck at me.

"What's that to you?" she said.

"I beg your pardon," said I, rising and speaking slowly; "but I heard you married him when your first husband was alive."

She leant against the table, and grew as white as she had been flushed before.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "you wouldn't have the law on me, a poor, weak woman, as can't

help herself, nor knows which way to turn at all."

She had to rest her hands on the table to keep herself from falling. I spoke quickly.

"You quite misunderstand me," I said. "Why should I have the law on you? It's no business of mine at all. Only you were blaming the Lord—I wanted to ask you whether you had tried to please Him yourself."

She was silent a while, whilst the tears rolled down her face

"I couldn't help it, sir," she said, falteringly, at last, "or, at least, I don't know—you don't know what old Jack was to me. And I hadn't no childer then. I didn't mean to be bad. But I can't do nothing now about it—it's too late for that—it's too late in all ways," she said.

"You can at least," I said, "find out if your first husband is alive."

"And what then, sir?" said she, looking at me till her blue eyes seemed to grow hard and round as she gazed. "Besides, he's sure to be dead now."

"Then you ought to be married again."

She broke into a wild laugh.

"Goodness, sir," she said, "one would think you was born yesterday. Do you think Dalton would ever take that trouble with me? Why he says now often enough he'd never marry if it was to do once more. We was married at a registry then—he's none so fond of the church, I can tell you."

"Then you ought to leave him."

"I beg your pardon sir?" she said, very slowly, and with a sort of grave dignity that astonished me.

"You ought to leave him."

Once more she started. Her face flushed, her eyes grew wild, her voice came fast and thick. If I had not known to the contrary, I might have thought she had been drinking then.

"And it's you as tells me that, Mr. Mason," she cried, striking her hand down on the table that was near her. "It's you as tells me I must leave a man as I've lived with more nor twenty years, all told—and borne him childer, too—and served for him,

and been with him, and been his wife and all. I'm to let him go and fend for himself now, after all these years is gone, and see him go to the ruin, and keep my hands before me. That may be your ways, sir ; gentlefolks has strange notions, they say. I'm a poor woman, and don't know such things as that. If he do go to the drink and let it misuse him, what's that ? There's others beside he as is worse nor that. *I wouldn't have taken so much from him all these years if I'd meant to leave him now.*"

There was a long silence.

" Well, Mrs. Dalton," said I, rising at last, for her words had almost overwhelmed me for the time, " I've no more to tell you. Go on in your own ways, I won't say you have not a good deal to say for them. But remember they are your own ways, that's all. Good morning." And I went.

So I left Pleasant Place once more.

CHAPTER X.

THE weeks passed on slowly till the chill spring became the early summer. That, too, was cold this year; and though we shivered often for economy's sake, I yet allowed myself and my companion a fire sometimes. The weather was hard on poor folk during all the early part of the year then. Still one could say it was warmer than it had been.

And the warmth suited Arce though it was bad for me; he began to flourish now. All through the winter and spring he had kept that curious drawn look on his face, that blue look on his lips as if the life itself were being withdrawn from them. He looked more alive now, and his features began to seem natural once more.

But he was not at all cheerful. Month by month as he lived with me his dejection had increased, At first he had been in too constant terror to be sad, then when he had found out at last that I did not mean to strike him, a

look of pining had come upon him that was curious to see. I thought perhaps he wished to see his mother, and sent him to her now and then. But that made no difference to him. He would sit drearily in the evenings with his head on his hand, thinking and thinking till some command of mine would rouse him with a start at last. For he would do everything I told him. I had begun to find him useful in many ways, quiet too in his movements, and with a sort of silent skill in those delicate hands of his that grew almost daily ; if he had not been so terribly nervous he could have learnt at once.

Now and then when my illness was worst on me, I was compelled to depend upon him, and began by slow degrees to trust him too: there was a comfort in that. But his silence and self-control were not pleasant to me ; I thought,

“ He is cleverer than I fancied him, he knows it is worth his while to keep in with me,” and I mistrusted him.

One evening, when it had been raining hard all day, I staggered downstairs from my bed-

room in one of my old fits of pain, and threw myself on the rug before the red embers in my sitting-room. There for hours I lay in the darkness, wrestling with agony as best I could, rolling on the ground and groaning with misery. When the worst was over I got up and struck a light. Then I started. For the first time I saw that I was not alone, there in a corner Arce was crouching, dressed, but with a blanket also over his shoulders, to keep him warm.

He got up and came to me. I was trembling, and felt covered with dust, my clothes were disordered, my eyes hot and bloodshot with the tears I had not been able to keep back. I would have given a great deal not to have been seen by him. But it was too late for that now.

I asked him roughly enough how he came there; he answered stuttering and stammering, that he slept there sometimes. Could he do anything for me?

It came into my mind at once that my narcotic stuff might possibly bring me most exquisite comfort, that he might knock up

the chemist and fetch some. I opened my mouth to give him the order. And then (I was half-delirious with pain), there came instead, in spite of myself, a torrent of fierce sentences, oaths, reproaches, that almost alarmed me and quite appalled him as he stood before me.

Was it not enough, I asked, that I had to endure his presence during the day, that he must come prying and spying upon me at night as well? Was I never to be free from him, by day and night; was he to be with me always? I pushed him violently away from me, it was all I could do not to strike him, and staggered upstairs again. Then, for I was exhausted with pain, I slept long and deeply.

When I woke late in the morning, dressed with difficulty, and came trembling downstairs, I found the fire lighted, the breakfast set, and everything dusted, in its place, and as dainty and clean as if a fairy had set it there. Arce raised his eyes when I came in—we never exchanged any greetings by morning or night—and we began our day in silence together.

Still I could not endure the fact that he had seen and heard me in my weakness, the sense of contempt in it became intolerable and not to be borne. (Perhaps I should not have been so sensitive about it if I had not been so ill.) I began to be harder than ever with him, scarcely speaking to him, and when I did, speaking in such a manner that I wondered he could even attempt to bear it. Yet he gave no answers, only now and then when I had been worse than usual, he would slink out of doors and spend the afternoon away from me.

I took no notice of this, until one day when I had gone out to buy drawing-paper and I came suddenly on him, walking as well as he could between two ill-looking men who were supporting him, for he had drunk so much that he was scarcely able to stand.

I took his arm, dragged him away from the others, hauled him in and upstairs as well as I could and left him. Then in the evening, when he was sober enough to understand me, I told him in few words that he was not fit to be trusted alone, and that in future he

must remain indoors unless I sent him on messages or could go out with him myself. He submitted quietly as usual.

How it rained that June! There seemed scarcely a day that was not spent in torrents. A change came in consequence to our life together. For one noon when Arce had come in from an errand, I heard the sound of loud disputing and swearing, too, downstairs. He said nothing however when he entered my apartment, but set quietly to his painting as usual.

But now the door opened, and Mrs. Smith came in, red with rage. She took no notice of me, she went up to the boy as he sat over his work and gave him, with her clenched fist, a box on the ear that all but knocked him over.

He started up at once with the face of a madman, but I was beforehand with him, took him by the shoulders and pushed him into his seat again. Then I sent him out of doors on some message or other, and addressed myself to my landlady.

“Look here,” said I, “you’ve no right to strike a boy like that.”

"You let him sleep yourself where a dog 'ud drown, Mr. Mason."

"That's no business of yours. What has he been doing now?"

"Oh! it was his impudence, and his manner, and the look of him. And none of the lodgers could abear him, and they would all leave, she knew they would. And he had pushed past her as she were washing the stairs and she had a right to wash 'em in her own house. And she were a orphin"—then came tears.

I quieted her as best I could.

"None of that folly," said I.

Then when I had got rid of her, I went at once to look at his room. I had been alarmed and the sight I saw did not encourage me. The slates were off the roof, the rain had got through, and the walls were streaming. And he had been looking ill lately. I was seriously dismayed, vexed with him, and still more vexed with myself.

That evening I told him in few words that if he wished to remain in the house he must be civil to the landlady, and I told him at the

same time, that he must now sleep in the same room with me. He gave no reply as usual. I had his things moved there at once, after they had been dried before the kitchen-fire.

That was a disagreeable necessity for me, but there was no other nook to be found. Still I disliked it, for I had never, since I was a child, shared a sleeping apartment before.

At ten we retired as usual. The rain was streaming and beating against the window. I set the tallow candle on the chest of drawers, sat down on a chair, and made notes on perspective in my pocket-book, whilst he busied himself timidly and rapidly with his arrangements for the night. His little mattress had been placed by the side of my bed, he was about to lie down on it when, remembering his clothes which he had left strewn all over the floor he went up to them (after a furtive glance at me), folded each article neatly and placed them on the remaining chair. Then he lay down. But there was another duty which he had forgotten though I had not.

“Arce,” said I, “are you a heathen?”

“No,” said he sulkily enough.

"Then why don't you say your prayers o' nights?"

No answer.

"I know," said I, for the silence had accused me, "that I don't often say my own, but that's another matter altogether. When a man has been knocked about the world, and come to the end of all his expectations, he loses heart for that sort of thing, only I can't bear the young to be heathens. Why don't you say any?"

A pause.

"I don't know any."

"Not the Lord's Prayer?"

"I hate the Lord's Prayer."

"Hate it?" asked I, in astonishment, "and why?"

"My mother made my father make me say it."

"That might be a reason," said I, "for hating your father, but not for hating the prayer."

"I do not hate my father."

He caught me up quickly and angrily, and then there was silence.

“ Ah, well,” said I, after a pause, “ it does not matter to me, you know.”

And then I thought whether I should say my own, and thought that, as I had not meant to do so, there would be a pretence about it, so I did not. And so the matter rested.

Or so it would have rested but for something that happened the very next day to that.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TIPSY PREACHER!

Go and hear the Topsy Preacher.

These words first met my eyes as they rested on the large placard the boys had brought with them to the class. I did not often look at such trifles, nor indeed were they often shown to me, but this one seemed to be more particular than usual. It was a great piece of cardboard that might have once been the side of a box, and a rough hand had daubed letters on it in red paint, and in a size that could be seen across a street. It stated—

GREAT NOVELTY!

STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT!

The Topsy Preacher Again!

The Topsy Preacher!

Go and hear the Topsy Preacher.

For One Night Only at Westourn Hall.

DRUNKARDS SPECIALLY INVITED!

“What does this mean?” said I.

There were many to answer, for the whole class was excited.

“Oh, it was a man—a strange man who came to the town at whiles—such a man—he preached beautiful; it would make you cry to hear him—only sometimes he drank so much he could not—and father said he couldn’t help it—and father said he was a wicked man, and oughtn’t to go about at all—and my brother said there was old Sal raving mad after she heard him—and Ned said he’d been stoned last time he came here, and serve him right too—but he could preach so beautiful.”

There seemed many opinions about him.

“Mr. Mason,” asked little Jack, “won’t you go and hear him yourself?”

“Thank you,” said I, “I have no special love for that sort of thing. I leave that to those who’d like to see the sun fall out of the sky for the sight of it, and not think that they’d have no light after. As for this, I reckon it’s no such pleasant matter to discover the faults of preachers—one would rather have the doctrines without the con-

traditions—but for those who go about openly with their sins on the head of them—living lies and whited walls—I would rather have nothing to do with them.”

I spoke in a manner that silenced the whole class on the subject for the morning.

Will it be believed that after that I went to hear the Topsy Preacher myself?

This was how it was. The boys went early that afternoon that they might go to a cricket match, and I was left with Arce alone. I thought he looked ailing, and remembered that he had not been out that day, also I felt a longing for the fresh air myself, so I told him to come with me. We strode out a long way into the country; all was fresh and beautiful after the rain. Neither of us said a single word—we had never walked together before—but the soft air was pleasant to me, and the great banks of dark clouds gathering beyond pleased my eyes as I walked. Coming back, we found the town lighted already. A crowd of people were hurrying down a small street; I paused to see what excited them so much; then I re-

membered the Topsy Preacher. I was rather excited myself with the lights and the darkness—gas lamps can have that effect—also with the composition of a picture that was in my head just then. A sudden idea seized on me.

“Come along, lad,” said I. “We’ll go and hear for ourselves. We don’t hear preachers often,” for indeed I had not been inside church or chapel for ten years and more.

Arce would have shrunk back—he always hated crowds—but I went on, and he had no resource but to follow. Through the surging crowd I pressed, down the narrow street, and into the wide building. People—chiefly of the very poorest sort—were streaming in from all quarters, but my strong shoulders helped me well; I forced my way in amongst them. When at last I could take breath I found myself in the centre place of a form that was the fourth seat from the rough platform made for the occasion. Arce had kept close behind me, and was on my right hand now.

That was a curious place for such a performance—Westourn Hall. It was one of those buildings that serve all sorts of purposes. It had been used for bazaars, for lectures, for cooking-classes; then it had been a music hall, and was now being fitted up for that again. The platform, as I have said, was of a temporary nature; two lamps were fixed in the wall beside it; there was a good high roof, and all down the two long sides of the room were brackets with statuettes of goddesses and heroines on them, holding lights, whilst their gowns dropped off their shoulders. In this way the room was lighted. The audience were of a very mixed order, and varied too in their ideas of behaviour; some were quiet and attentive, but the greater part were restless, whistling, stamping, or talking out loud, without any regard to their neighbours at all. I had never seen people about to engage in any sort of religious service behave so badly, but these were roughs, and neither the place nor the man seemed to inspire them with reverence. I could not help wondering how he would manage them

when he at last appeared. As the time drew near for him to come forward there rose quite a tumult, a knocking of feet and sticks, a violent shouting mingled with a calling out of angry names as if a fight were beginning. The people were all, or almost all, seated, but in their restlessness they seemed like a surging sea, and the noise they made was intolerable. I thought some disturbance or other was sure to follow, and that this night's work would not be easily concluded.

All at once a little door on the left hand of the platform opened, and a man came out and stood before the people. He was youngish looking, and very pale, and he had a great roll of prints under his arm that seemed almost as large as himself. As he passed under one of the lamps I could see by the light on his pale brown hair how soft and fine it was; he had very sloping shoulders, and great pale eyes with a curious force of expression about them. As he stood in front of the people, very quiet and not at all embarrassed, looking steadily at them with a glance that seemed to take in all from the

front of the room to the back, a curious silence fell upon his audience. In another minute you might have heard a pin drop close to you. Arce had been looking with the rest; he gave a great start, and seemed as if he were trying to shrink behind me altogether. I observed that, but I could not pay any attention to him; I was so much occupied with the man.

“My friends,” said he, in clear, penetrating tones—a voice that was not without some accent or other, but that was still marvelously distinct, and even refined in utterance—“I wish to illustrate what I am going to say to you to-night with these prints that I have here, but they are large, and, I am afraid, troublesome to manage.” He smiled a little, and glanced behind him, where one large nail ornamented the centre of the wall behind the platform. “If any one of you will kindly come up here and give me his assistance this evening I shall be grateful.”

He looked straight at his audience. There was a buzz and stir, but no one moved. Still he did not seem in the least discomposed;

his eyes sought quietly amongst them as if he were considering which of them would suit his purpose best. From the moment he came in he had singled out Arce and me; something in the former had seemed to attract him curiously. He looked at him now again long and hesitatingly, as at a face he did not quite remember; then looked away, then towards him again. Arce seemed obstinate, terrified out of measure, and fixed his eyes on the ground, but that did not save him. The preacher's voice rose again, clear and steady, though his eyes were considering still.

"I see a young face near me. Will that boy come and help me?"

There was no answer.

"Do you hear? The gemman is speaking to you," said a rough man, with a nudge of his elbow for encouragement, but Arce paid no attention.

The preacher said nothing, but his eyes looked still.

"Get up at once and go, you sulky dog!" muttered I under my breath.

He rose then, obedient but very reluctant, and was hustled and pushed over feet and knees till he had reached the little open space that formed the middle pathway of the room. There trouble seized him before he could mount upon the platform, for from out of one of the seats rose suddenly a big, burly man, a baker of size and fierceness, well-known for these qualities in the neighbourhood, and with a "I knows him," and a "Don't you have nothing to do wi' that chap, sir," laid hands on the boy, to the astonishment of the spectators.

Arce was too much overwhelmed to offer any resistance at all.

"I knows him," cried the baker, triumphant and indignant; "I knows the chap. Don't you have nothing to do wi' him, sir. That's the lad as stole a loaf out of my shop this last winter as ever was; he came right in and took it, as impident as could be, and I said if ever I found him again the justices should be on him for me. I thought I knew his ugly face when I saw it here. That's the lad, sir; I won't let him go now I've got'im ;

I'll go right out into the street and give him up to a policeman at once. Look out, you people, and make way," for some had risen.

"It's a lie," screamed Arce, his voice sounding cracked, as it always did when he was excited. "It's a —— lie. I never took your —— loaf. You're a ——"

And then came some of the very choicest words of his singularly foul vocabulary, but this only drew the attention of the audience still more upon him.

"Why, it's Arce Dalton," said a woman, and instantly came a tumult, a noise of rising, a hissing, a confusion of voices. Evidently the disturbance was beginning. The preacher, who had been standing in doubt, now came forward, as if he would descend from the platform, but before he could accomplish his purpose I had forced my way across the legs of those sitting near me, and reached Arce and the baker at last.

"Here, let him go," said I; "I'll get the truth out of him for you."

And I grasped him by the shoulder and dragged him towards me.

Arce was not vociferating now. He was deadly pale, and his eyes looked at me with a terror that yet had a kind of entreaty in it, as if he acknowledged in me both protector and judge. The rest were quiet at once, to see what would happen next.

"It's Mr. Mason," I heard some voices say, and then there was silence.

"Now then," said I, "no lies if you please. You took that loaf?"

No answer.

"You did?"

"I was so hungry."

There was a pause.

"There," said I, taking half-a-crown out of my pocket and pushing it into the baker's hand, "your loaf was not more than that, I'll warrant. Take that and let the boy go, putting him to prison won't do him good, nor you either. Besides, he's too bad for punishment, it's not worth while wasting it on him. Come, lad, we have disgraced ourselves enough for once, we'll go home now."

But here the preacher interfered.

He had come to the edge of the platform,

and had been looking on us steadily. A sort of smile was on his face, there was no doubt in his eyes now.

“Mr. Mason,” he said, “if that is your name, I shall be very much obliged if you will let this boy come up on the platform as I wished him to do.”

Arce shrunk behind me, and I felt no wish to bring him into public notice again, but I could see no help for it.

“Very well,” said I in as surly a manner as I could, “just as you like. You’ll have to look out for your pockets, you know.”

I felt a quiver through the boy’s frame as he stood near me, a faint, half-stifled cry came from his lips, but he said no word at all. I pushed him forwards, he mounted up on to the platform and the lecture began.

In less than an hour it was ended, but I can remember it now, and so I should think can all who heard it. I can see that scene, the great hall full of people listening and breathless, the flickering lights held by the heroines and goddesses, the great square oleographs, terrible to an artist’s eye, hung

up one after another on the nail behind the platform. I can hear the man's voice, penetrating, distinct, making no effort after eloquence, and yet holding the whole audience still as—his pale eyes shining all the while out of his pale face—the simple, vivid words that never paused for any moral at all seemed to make the very oleographs themselves live and move before us. The blind beggar by the wayside under the blazing Eastern sky, the Pharisee who was afraid to honour by too much politeness the Carpenter's Son; the woman who clung to His feet in her degradation, the crowds who came in the evening and brought their sick to the door; the man who "always, night and day, was in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones," these all were there. And still, as his words went quietly on, he seemed to make more and more clear to us, though without effort and without argument, that amongst all these crowds of sick and helpless, these wounded in body and in soul, these ruined, shamed women, these infirm diseased men, there must have been those who were

neither pleasant to look upon nor pleasant to touch, real sick, real sinners, infirm in body and in soul, whom the world, perhaps not unkindly, perhaps not without some pity and help, had yet left, and reasonably left, to that loneliness that seemed their due. These were His companions. He eateth with sinners; that was his title. And why? Because the greater evil meant the greater miracle. Because the deeper sin means the deeper misery, and He could pity that misery so much. That might explain why He should cure them; why did He eat with them then? Did He in very truth *like* this companionship? What possible fellowship with Him had such as these?

Suddenly, stopping himself and stretching out his hand (it was almost the first gesture he had made that evening)—

“Oh, my friends,” he cried, “we are outcasts to each other, we are never banished from Him. Down below our plague spots, faint and dim, and yet living in the worst of us, His eyes can see the life that He has given us.”

Stopping himself again, whilst a faint smile rose on his lips, and his eyes grew thoughtful as if he were seeing far away.

"There is one thing," he said, "that I should like to tell you."

Then he waited for awhile.

"You must forgive me if I speak of myself, I did not mean to do so; but that one scene has been so much before my mind this evening.

"My friends, last winter when I was on my way to preach at L— I passed one evening through this town of yours. It was a dark, cold night. I was hastening to catch my train, and much afraid that I should lose it and be late. But as I passed through one of the streets I heard a great noise. There was fighting, swearing—by the gas-lamp I could see a number of boys collected round one and striking out at him with all their might. I could not bear that, and stepped forward to help. Then they turned and ran away, and I was left alone with the boy they had been attacking. I came forward and spoke to him. I am sure I meant him no

harm. But he did not understand me. He thought perhaps I had been interfering, there was a sharp stone in his hand, and as I came close he flung it at me and ran. When I was able to get up and go on my way at last, for I had slipped and fallen, my train was gone, and my hope of preaching too.

“My friends, I cannot tell you the trouble that evening brought to me. I was ill from it, but that was a small matter. I was blamed; they would not believe my excuse; I had great trouble; and worse came. But I will not speak of that. Only through all those months there was one thing always before my mind, it seemed to be with me as if I could not get rid of it—that was the face of the bad boy who had thrown the stone at me. It was always there so before me; I could not bear it. I scarcely dared to enter your town again. I did not think—that the very first time I entered it—I should see him.”

He paused, and his audience, attentive before, became breathless now. I was in the front seat, but I could hear how suddenly

still they became behind me. He went on.

“It was in the spring-time—one evening—I was going through the town, I saw him suddenly before me. I was startled, but I could not forget his face. It was getting dark, but I had nothing to do that day. I thought I would follow him, this bad boy, and see where he lived, and what people belonged to him. It was getting very dark; he went on quickly, and did not see me as I came.”

A short silence.

“I was still following him. We had got through the better part of the town down into the poor streets. I was afraid of losing him, he went so fast. All at once I heard a sound of crying. A little girl had fallen down on the pavement. I would not stop or even look at her as she lay. What had I to do with a child like that? But *he* stopped. He waited an instant, then, all at once, he passed me and went back to her. I came close, for I feared he might hurt her. He picked her up from the ground, raised her in his arms, and kissed her.”

A long murmur, like a deep-drawn breath in the audience, then silence.

“ I followed them through the streets. He kept her still in his arms. I came close, for I wanted to speak to him if I could. But he paid no heed to me. He was talking to the child, and yet, as it seemed to me, talking to himself as well. He told her she was like his sister, and then he kissed her again. He told her he would like to see his sister; but he could not, because she lived at home, and he could not go near his father. And then he said he did not mind for that, because there was a master with whom he lived, a good, kind, dear master—so he called him—who was always so good to him. He said he did hope he would live—and paint—but he would give his hands or his eyes if he could for his master, who was good to him. And then all at once he kissed her, said he must go now, or his master would be angry, set her down in the street, and ran. I ran after him, but he went too fast for me. I came back, but the child was gone. So I lost them.

“And now, friends, I have only a few more words to say to you. You, as well as I, have seen that boy to-night. You have seen him—thief, liar, swearer—you have heard him called by one, too bad for punishment—by another, close to me, a ‘gallows bird,’ a ‘scamp,’ and ‘wretch,’ whom no kindness could cure. Very well, then—wretch, gallows bird, thief, swearer, outcast—is there yet nothing left in him, think you, to prove his brotherhood with you?”

He took the boy by the hand and drew him gently forwards. There was a hushed silence all over the room. But the stillness, the upturned faces, were more than poor Arce could bear. He dragged away his hand, covered his face, and broke down into violent hysterical weeping, like a girl's. I was myself excited, and the sound of this was more than I could endure. I was in a front seat, and I sprang from that on to the platform.

“Here, let the boy alone,” I said. “He's none of yours; what right have you to torment him in this manner?”

"Are you the master of whom he spoke?" said he, fixing his great pale eyes on me.

"I—I"—I stammered, and was silent.

A very pleasant smile rose on his lips.

"I have no more to say to him," he said; "but I should like to say some words to you. Will you wait till I have prayed first with the people?"

He knelt down; we all knelt; and then he prayed.

I have never heard a prayer like that. Passionate, simple, almost horrible in its earnestness, it seemed to struggle and wrestle as if it would force the blessing for which it pleaded. "Oh, Lord, help, save," came now and then like a cry in the midst of it. For sickness he prayed, for trouble, for wrong, for broken lives, for men who had once meant to do well, for homes dark in their misery and sin, homes where no gentle words came, homes where the breath of the summer even seemed foul and stifling, or that could shut up their windows in the winter-time, because the winter air would enter fast enough through

the walls of them. Still—"Oh, Lord, help, save us."

"We do not know or care for the troubles of others, we are lost in our own; we have no thought for these or for Thee. Help us. Teach us. Grant us pity for others; give us Thy pity for ourselves. Thou only art near to us, near to every heart in this great crowd as when Thy human presence moved amongst us. Still—help us; save us. Thou knowest our troubles, our sickness, our despair; we are lost without Thee. Is it nothing to Thee, then, that we perish?"

One instant he waited, whilst the sound of weeping went through the room. Then softly he began—"Our Father"—

The words were ended, that low, sobbing whisper that was yet the whisper of a crowd, was hushed into an intense stillness; but the people lingered on their knees, loth to rise and face their lives again. He, too, knelt, his thin hands clasped and clenched over his face—only the sound of the others rising made him raise his head at last. He stood then before them, that moving crowd, bent his head

gently to them—they were all subdued and very silent—and turned away. So his preaching ended. He had looked towards me, and I followed him, leaving Arce on the platform alone.

“You are the master of whom he spoke?”

He said that to me. We were in a little room close to the platform. We could hear the noise of the people leaving, the sound of their voices, yes, even some loud words and curses too, so the momentary impression had not lasted long. Yet, an impression had been made; I could not forget that. There was a lamp hanging on the wall. He had thrown himself down on a chair by the table, and laid his head on his arms with gesture and manner of such utter dreary despair as I had never even imagined before. I stood waiting. That first moment was for himself. Then he raised his head, looked at me, and spoke.

“I—I suppose so,” faltered I.

“My friend, I did not need the scene of to-night to tell me your influence over that

young life. Think, then, that God has given a young soul into your hands, and that some responsibility"—

"But you don't understand," interrupted I. "Excuse me, but I must set this matter clear to you. It is not at all in the way you think it. He hurt me, and I have been hard to him. He hates me—I know he does. Why do you smile at me in that way? Can you not believe me?"

He shook his head slowly and gravely. It had been a sweet, strange smile that seemed to make his face brighter, even now it had passed.

"I am afraid not."

"And why not?"

"I have heard him speak of you."

Something in his manner checked me also to silence.

"You will teach him?" said he, breaking the pause in a sort of pleading way. "You will not let him grow up quite without God, will you? Think! he has no home to tell him. Oh, do not call me impertinent! If he were to say one prayer now, each evening"—

"I never say my own."

He looked up suddenly, and the smile broke over his face again.

"You will—will you not?"

I do not know how I could have borne this from another; but from *him*, it would have been more easy to have refused a woman.

"I will, indeed, I will," said I, with a sudden impulse; "and so shall he."

"Thank you."

He let his head droop on his hand; the dark look came over his face almost directly he ceased to speak. I stood and watched him for some time. There were strange, conflicting feelings in my heart. I spoke at last, and suddenly:

"It must be a fine thing to know how to move people as you can move them."

He raised his head slowly. His eyes met mine with a curious searching gaze. There was no light on his face when he spoke or thought of himself. His words came at last very quietly; slowly as if he were weighing each even to himself before he spoke it.

“And how do you think I have learnt to move them then?”

“Because you are a saint, I suppose,” said I, surly and half scornfully.

“No.”

“How then?”

“Because I am a sinner.”

Silence.

“I can’t tell you it all—I can’t,” he said, with a sort of moan. “You would not understand it if I did. It is because there is one sin—one—one—that has got hold of me, and grips me back when I try to escape from it; and is killing me, and has been killing me ever since I have been a child, and I doubt it will kill me, body and soul, at last. It is because I cannot bear that others should be lost—lost—falling”—

He let his head sink on his hand once more. Then suddenly raising it, and with his pleasant smile—

“I must go,” he said; “but you will remember?”

“I will, indeed, I will,” said I.

He grasped both my hands, then went, and

I went back to where the boy stood quiet on the platform. I have never seen the man since or heard, or spoken of him ; nor, strange as it may seem, would I ask after him, even if I could do so. A sort of dread would restrain me, and has restrained me always when I think of him. I like to think sometimes that his head was wrong, and that he could not control his actions. Yet, that is dangerous doctrine, I would not admit it for another. I will leave him then. Yet this much only must I say, remembering all he did for me in the course of one short evening, when others had left me alone so long. Heaven itself would not seem quite complete to me unless I found the Topsy Preacher there. Let that pass now.

* * * * *

Arce and I were very quiet all that evening. Seeing him so pale and tired I thought it best to say nothing, when we came to go to bed though I did not forget for myself. The next morning however, before we set to our work, I stopped him and told him that he

must find a prayer before night and bring it to me for approval. I suppose he thought I ought to have some time allowed me for judgment, for he brought it that afternoon.

We were alone together, each at his window, for the boys had again a half-holiday for the cricket match. I was rejoicing in the stillness and painting hard with my left hand, hoping to get an old picture completed that day. He was to touch up a group of figures, some peasant girls in the neighbourhood that he had just finished marvellously well, considering how little figure drawing he knew.

He had got out and arranged his easel and canvas; then, instead of beginning to work he flushed very red and came and stood at my elbow.

"Mr. Mason," he said, "I have a prayer now."

"Oh, have you?" said I, for I never felt inclined to talk to him.

"I—I am not sure it is a good one," he stammered, nervous as if he were about to confess a mortal sin. I made no reply.

"I—don't know if you know it—it ends with 'bitter pains of eternal death.'"

The words seemed strangely familiar to me, I looked up now.

"What is the good of telling me the end of it," I said. "How does it begin?"

He began at once, standing in front of me, with his arms hanging by his sides, as if he were repeating a lesson.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live"—

"Why—why—*stop*," interrupted I, surprised, and unpleasantly surprised too, as the familiar words, not heard for years, came to my ears again, "that comes from the Burial Service."

"I know," said he quietly, and went on, "hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. I don't know what comes next," he said, breaking off here and looking at me.

"And how is that?"

"It was on two torn bits of paper, there were only those two. It was something about sins, my mother said. She said when I got

to 'misery' I was always to make a—a—waiting-place."

"A pause?" I asked.

"A pause, for sins, and then go on."

"But why did you not look out the rest in a Prayer Book?"

"We had none."

"Ah! well," said I, for I had none either.

"Go on now, or say the beginning again."

He began quietly—

"Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery" (the pause for sins). "Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death."

And here he stopped and looked at me.

"You like that?" I asked.

"I like it."

"Ah! well, it will do if you like it. You may go now. But I wish," I muttered to myself as he went, "that he had not chosen his prayer out of the Burial Service."

However that might be, the prayer was chosen, and chosen it remained. From that

time one of my keenest remembrances is the sight of him kneeling by his mattress night after night, the last thing always before lying down on it, his black hair combed out of all its tangles, for I saw to that now, his thin hands clasped over his eyes, his lips repeating half-aloud, that I might be quite sure he said it. The words and the young voice are in my ears now, I heard them so often then.

“Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery” (the pause for sins). “Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.”

Incomplete the words might be, they always seemed complete enough to me.

CHAPTER XII.

DAYS came and went, the summer came on apace. There were roses and strawberries in the gardens, there were wild roses in the hedges for all who had time to gather them.

“ I have no leisure for flowers,” I happened to say one day ; the next morning Arce, who had been out on an errand to the country, laid a spray of the pink blossoms timidly by my plate before our dinner began. I said no word to him, but I did not reject them, and after that he often brought in flowers for me.

Soft summer weather, blue skies, white clouds sailing across them, these had their effect on us both. I was ill off enough in point of health, but glad of the beauty notwithstanding. Arce flourished in these days ; like a delicate plant, he always wanted sunlight and heat to sustain him. I had never seen him so like a boy as he was now, his face was paler and not so sallow, many of his ungainly twitchings were gone, and but for

the dark light that always shone and burnt in his eyes he might have seemed not altogether different from others.

But he had been growing a great deal, and that alarmed me, for he seemed to have no strength for anything—he wanted a little of the iron beneath that kept me up in spite of all. Now and then, well as he was, he would be so tired in the evenings, that I would force him to leave off his work, and he would sit idle, lost in thoughts or dreams over which his brows knitted or his hands clenched.

What these were I cannot tell, he kept all his feelings to himself; I never saw a nature so shut up in itself, poor lad, as his.

Down in the midst of the summer I had one of my worst times and he kept the house for me, doing all the work whilst I, too ill even to eat, lay on my bed all the hours when I was not teaching.

Now and then as I lay there the thoughts of never rising again would sweep over me like great waves I was too weak to combat, but I rose from this attack too, notwithstanding. He had done wonders all the time

I was prostrate, and was more pleased with his dainty housework than I had ever seen him with his painting—dusting, scrubbing, even cooking sometimes with the same anxious care and with a skill whose growing wonders I could only look on at and admire.

There was a sort of refinement in his ways that must have been native to him, though half lost in his education. His timidity however remained the same, a word could upset him, and when his nerves were once stirred, no sort of sense was possible to him at all. My nerves also had been stirred; when I got better from my illness it seemed scarcely possible to me to endure his presence sometimes.

Yet I felt vaguely that I owed him something, a debt that grew daily with all his cares for me. And I was not going to be neglectful. His painting, which formed the only ground where we could meet without bitterness, offered the most obvious means for recompense. I had had many dreams for it ever since I had first known him, and now, now that all those months of training had taught

me, what I had always wished to believe, that this was no surface talent, but a growing power I had not yet been able to fathom (I never did fathom it, Jeanie), I knew I could not be doing my duty if I neglected it.

I took occasion therefore to show a small set of drawings, gnomes dancing by moonlight, (I had let him amuse himself with these in the evenings), to some artist friends of mine, and their astonishment exceeded even what I had expected of them. I showed them then some ordinary subjects, more doubtfully, he was still weak in many technical matters, and they were even more delighted with these.

Finally, though with great difficulty, I extorted from them a sort of half-promise that the lad should not be neglected when his year with me was over. They would not give me any distinct words; still I knew they meant what they implied, and already in fancy I saw a regular school education, a painter's studio, and then a studio of his own, waiting to receive him.

"Ah!" I could not but say inwardly, "if

my youth had known such assistance once ! ” I would have let him go immediately in spite of all it would cost me, only that I dreaded so much to turn this untamed nature out upon the world as yet ; though certainly a great change had come upon him lately.

Meanwhile we worked hard, though I only dropped hints to him of hopes to come. I had taken away from him a beautiful painting he had begun of roses on a marble table, so jealously eager was I to prevent any superficial finishing from him, and had kept him, hard at work instead on perspective and figures, hiring boys and old women for him, and setting him to work over and over again at my own rough hand, spread out for his benefit in all sorts of lights and attitudes, each painted out as soon as the next was begun, that his flesh-tints might improve. (I did sometimes feel a longing to paint on my own account a hand more beautiful than mine, but the dull pain of my resentment would not yet suffer me to copy that which had hurt my Psyche.)

That summer too I saw my friendly pool

again. Arce and I went there one evening when work was over. But not to paint. Before my illness we had sat out of doors often in every moment of leisure, mornings, evenings, half-holidays, working with all our might, whilst I pointed out to him the little bits of yellow lichen that brighten the roughness of walls, or the tender, receding grays, as trees fade one after the other into the distance. I would make him sit looking and looking and doing little; I wanted to educate his eyes till no delicate shade of colour should be lost. But for the last part of the summer I dared not sit out of doors and paint at all. Only, this evening, I threw myself down on the ground by the pool (I could not help that in spite of the danger of it) and saw the sunset flash into it, and saw the reeds and the stones golden round it, and the dark bushes watching so quietly above; and thought how once before it had meant recovery to me! The sky was just getting red when we turned away.

“Ah,” I said, “if anyone could paint this for me!”

I had spoken aloud, but I did not think he heard.

I was away all through the holidays in London, busy with seeing artists for his sake and the doctor for my own. Everything seemed to go well, and I sold a golden sunrise of mine for a considerable price. When I came back I found my wolf's cub had kept the peace well enough with our landlady, and had kept our rooms in order too. She complained much, however, that he was out all day and till late in the evening also, but he showed me many lovely sketches, and they contented me. From that time, and whilst the summer lasted, he was always out at work whilst I worked within.

Mrs. Dalton came to see us several times, and the good son came down to the town once, but did not deign to come and look at his brother at all. I heard many strange reports of the father, but I never took much notice of such talk as that.

Poor Brown meanwhile had been getting into difficulties. The milliner's 'prentice, quite wild, as it would seem, with the *holidays*

she had enjoyed since her marriage, had turned such a desperate flirt there was no keeping her in any sort of bounds at all. The poor boy, not yet twenty, must have had a great deal of trouble with her. First, came in a set of bills, he paid and forgave. Then another set, he paid and forgave again. Then a bill for a supper with certain young men and women of the neighbourhood—he seemed to find that more hard to endure. Finally, one night I was awaked by a great noise under my window, and looking out, saw the light of lanterns below. I was told afterwards that Mrs. Brown had been lost, and that the friends of her young husband had kindly assisted him in his search for her. The matter, however, was not as bad as it might have been, she came back the next day, having only gone with her mother and some friends up the country. Then there was a general laugh against the husband, and they laughed so much and so long that he was put out of all countenance at last, and almost compelled to leave. The only comfort was that his wife behaved better. I did, indeed,

hear that on the morning of her return his mild temper had been roused to bestow on her some much needed correction. However that may be she certainly seemed quieter and they left. They went off very silently; he never came to see me at all, and I have never heard of him since though I would like to know what became of him.

Rover lamented his loss much and became very pale and dismal for awhile—his only consolation consisting in being with me on all possible occasions, for his duties with the curate seemed far more nominal than heavy. Often he stayed to dinner, and brightened not a little our silent meal. By degrees there sprang up a curious sort of a friendship between him and Arce; he talked to him persistently, smiled at him, and joked at him, until the poor outcast, expanding a little, would even show at times a shy brightness that quite astonished me. I am afraid that annoyed me as well, I did not wish to talk to the lad myself, but it vexed me to see that he *could* talk with another. They soon got into mischief too. I came home one

morning to find all my dinner crockery on the floor; they had been moving the leg of the table till it broke. That was a loss for me, I saw no harm therefore in immediately demanding back from Rover some money I had given him for errands that morning—as for Arce, I said there was never any good in punishing *him*. He was leaving the room as I spoke, and the words seemed quite natural to me. But Rover waylaid me that evening.

“Mr. Mason,” he said, solemnly, and opening his blue eyes as if the effort with which he spoke were a wedge under the lids of them.

“Well?” said I.

“Mr. Mason.”

“*Well?*”

“I wish you would not say that to Dalton.”

“That—what?” asked I in amazement.

“*That*—about not punishing him.”

“Folly,” said I; “does he want me to punish him then?”

“He’s changed,” said Rover, meditating.

“He’s not a bit the same chap he was. I

think you hurt him when you talk like that."

But I paid no attention to him.

So once more the summer passed.

Our last summer. I had no idea of the end that was close at hand then.

August had been fine, soft, and warm; September set in dull and rainy, sharp with cold too on its finer days, as if the winter had begun already. I had fires sometimes in spite of expense, yet we could not be warm. Arce began to droop at once, already I wished for his sake that the winter were over. As for me, my illness returned with the damp, we were a wretched pair together. Some young artists came down to our town with an old acquaintance of mine, and would have me much amongst them, but their champagne and light talk did not suit me, and I was glad when they departed. Almost immediately afterwards the good son paid us a visit at last.

He was a young, thickset man with small blue eyes, a brown suit, and new boots that creaked—respectable looking enough,

but with none of his mother's grace or his brother's cleverness about him. However, he *was* respectable, and that was more than could be expected of a Dalton. He stayed with us for a whole Saturday afternoon, Arce keeping timidly by his side with a shy awe and frightened pride in him that were almost pitiful to see. His brother took scarcely any notice of him, and discoursed principally with me. At the end, before he went, he took hold of my hand and thanked me for being kind to Andrew. For himself, he said, he was going to live in Leicester, he could not stay in these parts, it was a hard thing that a man's family should drag him down so much. With that he gave a sort of nod at his brother and went. Arce was very pale and silent all the evening and yet pleased with himself too; he felt all the pride of such a relationship. For myself, I only said inwardly that the young man was not a painter.

That same time I had a visit one rainy evening from a picture dealer, a grey-haired old fellow, much given to bad tobacco, but

clever at his trade notwithstanding. He would have nothing to say to any work of mine, but he admired the flowers of Arce exceedingly, and sat by the table studying them all the evening. I had rather depended on his promising to dispose of something of mine, but that could not be helped. I made arrangements now for the boy to paint for him.

“That chap beats you, Mr. Mason,” he said at last in a loud voice, pointing his finger at him as he moved away. And turning round I saw the light on my pupil’s face, though he drooped his eyes at once as they met the glance of mine. I said nothing, but the words had stung notwithstanding.

So the rainy days succeeded each other. Arce worked hard, and grew pale and thin. I think he was anxious about his father, his mother seemed always in tears now. But I asked him no questions. There was a wasted look about him as if he were hungry; yet I saw that he ate and slept, though I did no more for him. And here—though you, Jeanie, have never heard of them—I may

mention that in after years, when he had long passed out of the reach of any treatment of mine, there were many rumours in the town about me and about him. It was said that I was in the habit of treating him brutally, and that he owed his illness to me. That was not true—at least in the sense in which they meant it. I never struck him but once, nor on that occasion was it possible for me to help myself. It was in this manner.

One evening I had sent him on a message, and as he did not return I became alarmed (though there had been no outbreaks for a long while), and went to look for him myself. It was well I did. Coming round the corner of a street I came on him suddenly, led by a rough man, and surrounded by a crowd of boys—in this manner, as I was told, being escorted to prison. The man was a carpenter of an inferior order; he had gone out that afternoon, and returned to find every pane of one of his windows broken. In a great rage he made inquiries. Arce was unhappily near, and was laid hold of immediately. Some

boys were ready to swear that they had seen him there that afternoon, and in spite of his protestations he was condemned at once. Now it was true that he had been out once before that day, but in an opposite direction. By hard running he might, perhaps, have done my errand and broken a window at the other end of the town as well, but I thought it most unlikely. Nothing I could say, however, had any effect; his bad character had more weight with his accusers than any assertions of mine. The man would "ha' 'un poonished," and there was an end of it. The boys, too, were all ready to turn impromptu witnesses at once. Finally, after much arguing, and as my only hope of saving him from gaol (which makes a bad resting-place for an artist), I agreed to pay for the window and give him a thrashing besides, the carpenter throwing in this last for his own private satisfaction. Then I took him by the arm and marched him off, the boys all following us and ready to pelt if only they had not been afraid of me. When we got to my rooms safely at last I examined him closely.

He assured me over and over again, and most quietly and earnestly, that he was innocent. I believed then, as I believe now, that he told me the truth, but as I had given my word I thought it my duty to keep it, and he submitted.

So the autumn passed. I must come now to the beginning of the end.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT can be told quickly, but God only knows the shame with which I write of it.

On the 20th day of October I came home in the evening. I had been with the picture dealer again (he was then in the town) negotiating for my young artist, for in those days it seemed scarcely possible to me to do any work at all that had not some reference to him. Arce had all but finished the picture he had agreed to paint, a rich tradesman was to buy it, he was to take it to the dealer that evening, and I made arrangements as to its price. After some struggling I was able at last to leave the house content and much relieved, for the affair had been on my mind for weeks, and ah, oh, only we artists know the back ways by which we have to dispose of our genius.

It was still early in the evening when I came back, dark and bitterly cold, though it

had not been snowing. At the door I paused. My great bare sitting-room was bright with gas and firelight; all was in order there. Arce had drawn his easel close to the fire, and was painting with all his might. It was a simple enough subject that I had chosen for him—he had begun it long ago in the summer—a mass of roses in a beautiful china jar, the intense richness of colouring in the flowers contrasting with the delicate painting of the vase, and with the darkness of the background behind. It was a subject that suited him, every part of it, and he had done it well, working with a delicate minuteness that would have been all but impossible to me. For once I had let him finish to his heart's content; now I came and stood behind him, he only just raising for an instant his tired eyes to me, following his glance with mine whilst he surveyed his work, then added two small, sharp touches, then lowered his hand again.

“That will do, boy,” said I, placing mine on his shoulders. “Put your brushes away.”

Then I went to my room and took off my hat.

Had I thought then of jealousy, pain, or anger? Had I not been interested in his picture, glad of it, glad to see it in such perfection at last? What devil moved me then? I cannot tell.

Perhaps it was the sight of him as I returned, standing before his picture, his eyes full of light, love, and pride, his future before him. Perhaps it was the thought of myself, so full of failures, soon to be left so lonely; and he had hurt my Psyche. I stood and watched; all at once he bent down his head and kissed it.

I came forward then. Something rose in my throat, took possession of me altogether. He raised his eyes. I saw by the change in his face what the change in mine must be.

"Arce," said I, hoarsely, standing before him, "you do not like it when I tell you that you have never had punishment from me."

He was silent, standing white and still before me,

"Would you like it if I were to punish you now?"

Still silence.

"Give me your picture."

He looked at me, and gave it without a word. Could not even that have softened me? But I was mad with passion then.

I took out my heavy clasp knife; I slit it from top to bottom. I cut and rent, tearing it even with my hands, till it fell in pieces round me. I broke the wooden framework with my fingers and let that fall as well; then I looked at him. I think he had not moved. When I first touched it he had started, that was all. Our eyes met, mine wild with passion, his full of a strange light, but quiet too. I could not bear to see him so still over it; I stepped forwards and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"What do you say to *that*?" said I.

No answer.

"Did you deserve it from me or not, tell me?"

"I—I—I did deserve it," he answered with a sob.

I had meant to rouse his resistance and now—astonishment caused me to relax my grasp, and he moved away.

“Stay where you are,” I commanded; he paid no heed, but turned and left the room.

It was the first time he had ever disobeyed me since he had lived with me. I heard him shut the door, go downstairs, shut the outer door again. He was gone. I fell down into my chair and thought. I think half-an-hour passed before I moved again.

What were my feelings then? The fire burnt, the gas shone, the torn and broken pieces lay at my feet, and I was alone. My head still trembled and whirled with passion, with the exhaustion too that comes when passion is over, my knees and my feet shook, still my brain was clear. What were my thoughts then?

Shame came first, utter overwhelming shame that seemed to cover and to enfold me. I had yielded to my passion; I, a strong man, had yielded childishly, absurdly, as if I had been child or boy, I had covered myself with ridicule by my conduct. The

torn pieces lying before me had each a sting for me; I felt almost afraid of myself too, for I knew now that there were moments in which my self-control could go. Yes—I had failed. I had meant to do a good work, and I had broken down at the last; one moment had vanquished the control of months, I was on his level now. The meanest motives too had influenced me; I despised myself.

Oh, I had not wished to hurt him, there had been moments when it had been pain to me to give pain to him. That other day now—I had not wished to hurt him then—no thought of my own wrong had mixed with my conduct; I had only hated to be obliged to touch a sickly boy like that. And he had been so patient too. Now—now—I was his protector and his guardian no longer. I was worse than he—he could tell me that I had no right to call on him for penitence now. And then came the rush of passion, and rejoiced that I had at last injured one who had hurt my Psyche.

I reasoned myself out of that, and forced myself into penitence again. I was wrong,

had done wrong, there was no excuse for me. Yet—yet—the thought would come to me—if he had taken his picture, had gained the money and come back triumphant, that would have been hard enough to bear. Ah me! if I had only had such hopes as his. And then, seized by a sudden thought, I rose and looked at the clock. More than half-an-hour had passed. I looked out. It was a dark cold night, the lights of the town shone far out in the distance, the wind was rattling furiously against the windows. Where had he been all this while? Out in the cold, and in the darkness—that delicate lad?

A horror seized on me. I fell on my knees, though I could not pray; I rushed for my hat, then I made up the fire, turned out the gas (mindful of economy even then), and went out into the darkness. Once more I had to try to save the lost, and this time one lost through me.

How I got through the night time to Pleasant Place I cannot tell.

Mrs. Dalton sat there alone. One tallow candle burnt in the room, everything was in

confusion, she sat on a footstool in the midst of the floor with her face in her hands. As she heard my step she sprang up.

"Oh, sir—sir," she cried, "can you tell me where Andrew is now?"

I stood still confounded.

"Sir—sir—is he at your house—tell me—do tell me?"

She got up and took hold of my coat as if to force me to speak. Shame and terror held me, faintness too from coming into that close room out of the cold darkness without, it was not possible for me to have spoken to her. Instead, I went to the wall and leant against that. Then, thank God, necessity compelled me, and I gathered my courage once more.

"I do not know where your son is," I said, determined to tell the truth to her. "I have come to look for him. Has he been with you to-night?"

"Oh—oh—yes."

"His father was here?"

"Yes—yes."

"Come now, be sensible," said I, "and do

not cry like that. Tell me everything and I will do all I can to help him and you. His father was here when he came ? ”

“ Yes—yes—oh, Mr. Mason ! ”

I sat down to give her more courage by my calmness. Yet I was trembling myself.

“ It was about—about the picture,” she said, and I trembled so much it was with difficulty I could support myself on my seat.

Yet I was determined to be brave. She misunderstood my silence.

“ Oh, sir,” she cried, almost wringing her hands as she stood before me, “ if he do say what isn’t the truth sometimes it isn’t his fault, I know. He hasn’t been brought up right, he hasn’t. But he did say—more nor once—to him and me—as he were painting a pictur’ ”—

“ Yes, go on.”

“ And Dalton—he wants money—and he said as he were to bring it to-night—it or the gold for it—and he came—and he hadn’t got it—it or nothing else either—and he wouldn’t answer when he were spoken to. And his father were mad-like, he’s often that

now, but never so bad as that. And I think he 'ud 'a killed him if the neighbours hadn't come in, and he took and ran out into the streets, and said that you nor me should never hear of him again."

"Say that again, please," said I.

"He said that we'd never hear of him," said she; "he said that he'd go where Mr. Mason nor me'd never find him to bring him back no more."

I shuddered horribly for one instant, I could not help it. Then I raised myself to go.

Yet one more question remained, and though I faltered, I asked it.

"Had he spoken of me before?" I said.

"He? no, sir."

"Not a word to blame me?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Ah," (there was no time for confession then) "show me now which way he went."

She showed me (it was not the way to my house) and I went out into the darkness again.

Oh, God help me! the horror of those dark streets, of those cruel lights, is with me

still; I cannot speak of them even to you. Let me pass them then in silence.

I had got about half way to my home when some sudden impulse made me turn back and go straight towards the river. There was a bridge there where I had often seen him in the days before he lived with me. It was the mercy of God that directed me. I had gone through some dark back streets, past some brilliantly lighted shops. I was close to the river then and stood still in some shadows to think. All at once a young figure that had been leaning against a lamp post started up from before me. I think I followed him even before I had recognised.

He went swiftly and quietly. I had no time to think. He took the turning towards the river. I could see the black water and the lights in it now—there were not many lights just there. He paused for an instant, then he went on, not up towards the bridge, but down the steps to the river's brink.

There was a stone pathway—some men were standing talking before they parted for the night. He waited in the shadow of the

bridge till they had gone, and I chose out a dark place and waited too. Then he came and stood by the edge of the water. I moved a step onward to go to him. He heard the footstep, flung his arms over his head with a wild cry and plunged forwards. In another instant the water had closed over his head, and there was silence. No one was near. I flung myself down on the pathway. His head rose, by the mercy of God again it was close to land. I stretched out my hand over the water, seized him by the shoulder and dragged him in to shore. It was all over in an instant.

We stood together under one of the gas lamps. He was dripping from head to foot, shuddering and panting for breath; if I had not held him he would have dropped. I think for the first instant he did not recognise me, then all at once he started violently, but my grasp was on him, and there was no escape for him.

"You fool, you beast," said I, shaking him, for I was very angry, "what do you mean by this?"

He gave no answer, he was trembling too much, he clung to me in a sort of horror as if but for me he must fall backwards into the water again. Looking at his face I could see that it was pale and wild, his blue lips struggling in an agony for the breath that would not come to them. I became terrified then.

"Look here lad," said I, "we'll go home at once."

But he could scarcely stand. I saw that, and bent down to him, put his hand (cold as a corpse) over my shoulder, lifted him up easily into my arms (almost trembling to feel how light he was) and so carried him home quickly through the darkness.

The fire was blazing in my sitting-room. I set him down on the rug and rushed to my room for things of my own, for I had no time to look for his, stripped off his wet clothes, got him as dry and as warmly wrapped up as I could, and set him in my own chair to rest. Not till then did the death-colour begin to waver in his lips, he had struggled for breath the whole time, and

had not been able to move hand or foot to help me. Now, at last, he was quiet save for the nervous tremour that shook him continually. I left him to rest, got some beer and heated it, then sent the maid to Mrs. Dalton. After that I put the room in order, not without trembling myself, then sat down on his stool, since he had my chair, and, we were silent. A long time passed.

* * * * *

"Arce," said I, "you are nothing but skin and bone."

I had spoken to my own thoughts since he would give no word to me. He had ceased to tremble now, but he had kept his eyes on the ground, not daring to look towards me. Now he raised them and smiled faintly. He was still pale as death, even though the glow of the firelight was on him, so, wasted-looking that he was lost in the great, red, dressing-gown of mine that was wrapped round him yet. Our eyes had not met till that instant, but we could not look away from each other now.

"So you wished to drown yourself, lad?" said I (I had spoken with no special roughness, but he was so weak that his lips quivered even at that).

He gave no answer.

"Do you think that was right?"

No answer.

"Do you think the Lord is pleased with those who come before Him when He has not called them, to tell Him they have been running away even to Him?"

Still silence.

"That's a coward's trick," said I.

He said nothing.

"Why was it—tell me?"

No answer.

"I know. You were angry."

"No, I was not," said he raising his eyes suddenly.

"Why then?"

"So—so wretched"—

"About your picture?"

"Don't—don't," said he, as if I had struck him. And the tears stood on his cheeks. But, weak as he was, I felt it was necessary for us to understand each other now.

"Look here, lad," said I, "rouse yourself to say a few sentences, and I will ask no more from you. Is all this because of me—what I did? Or is it because of your father too?" *My* voice trembled now, I felt as if I must understand it. "Is it at all because your father has beaten you?" for I had seen the marks of that.

He looked up slowly.

"Did that hurt you?"

"I expected that," he said.

"Expected it?"

"I knew, to-day, my father would be angry."

"Why did you go to him then?"

"I thought—he would come to you."

Consideration for me was that? I felt half-choked. Still I went on—

"Why did you know he would be angry?"

"It was about—the picture."

"Go on."

"He wanted—the money for it—I was to bring that—when I had sold it."

"And you did not mean to? Quite right; the picture was yours and not his. The

money would have been yours too after you had sold it."

"But I did not mean to sell it."

The words seemed to come from him against his will. I looked at him in astonishment.

"You never told me that."

"I did not know—till to-day."

After a pause and turning alternately pale and violently flushed.

"You said—to-day—you liked it."

I was thunderstruck, for one moment I could not speak, I could scarcely breathe. Then I sprang up with an oath, I cried—

"Do you think any wretched picture of yours is worth my Psyche to me?"

Arce said nothing, he laid his head down on his hands and cried.

"Look here, lad," said I at last, "stop that noise of yours, for I vow I can endure it no longer. I don't mean to be unkind," as he raised a distorted face, "you've had enough to bear already to-night from me. But, look you, it's no use, we can't like each other, it's not possible, you know. I believe sometimes you have tried after your fashion, but it's no good

you see. Only we'll do our duty by each other, both of us, if you hurt me I have hurt you, and I can't complain of you now. I don't make excuse for myself, there is none. I'm an older man than you, and had no right to disgrace myself before you by my conduct. Don't speak!" for he had looked up. "We won't ever speak on the subject again. We understand each other now, and now you shall have some hot beer and go to bed."

I forced it down his throat, made him say his prayer there by the fire, then carried him into the next room and laid him in his bed for he was too weak to move himself. Then, taking my candle, I began rummaging for some paper, for I had to write to the picture-dealer.

Having found it, I was going to leave the room, but, passing by the end of his mattress, I looked at him. He was lying wide awake, his cheeks flushed, his eyes open and full of terror, a sort of spasm crossed his face as I looked.

"Horrible, horrible things," he said as if to himself.

"There—there—nonsense," said I going to him, "what are you talking about now?"

"Oh! don't go! don't leave me!" he cried, in an agony of entreaty I can never forget, "I see them; I can't help seeing them," and he passed his hand over his eyes.

I was afraid of the fever, and sat down by his side on the floor.

"Are they as bad now when I am here?" I asked.

"No."

"Go to sleep then."

I put one arm under the pillow to raise his head, and took into my other hand the hand that rested on the counterpane. He nestled close up to me with a long sigh of relief, in a few minutes he was sleeping quietly and peacefully as a child, though with a heaviness of exhaustion such as no child can know. I drew my hand softly away then and went to write. When I came back he was sleeping still.

I had told the picture-dealer, without wasting words on details, that my pupil's picture had been injured by me, but that he

would have another ready, I hoped, before more than a few weeks were passed.

"If only the Lord will let it be so," I added to myself, for I felt uneasy. Nevertheless, as I was very tired, I went to bed and slept.

The next morning passed much as usual, only that, tired as I was, it was no small matter to me to have to do all my errands too. Arce did not get up till noon, and then sat in my chair, so white and languid that it was plain nothing was to be expected from him. Nor would he eat either. I let him be the first hour, the second, the third, then I left my teaching and came to him.

"Can you not do anything?" I asked roughly.

He raised a miserable face and was silent.

"Can you not paint?"

"No—no"—

"You fool—get up and paint at once."

"I can't—can't ever," he answered sobbing.

And I saw he meant what he said. But I knew what to do. I went at once and got

out his easel and paint-box, his rags and turpentine, set his brushes in order, and put his seat in its place. Then I fetched from my bedroom a great sponge I had just bought, and set it before him.

“Paint that,” said I, and went.

I do not know how long he was before he began, but he had made a good rough painting of it by the time the evening came.

Ah ! well, all that week he ailed somewhat, but by the time it was over, he was almost himself again. I believe still that he would have recovered without difficulty if it had not been for that which happened then.

CHAPTER XIV.

I WAS sitting painting alone in my room on the Saturday half-holiday, when the door opened, and Arce burst in on me. The first glance at his face made me start to my feet at once.

I think I have never seen such horror on any human countenance before or since. His eyes were wild and fixed, and as if they saw nothing, his lips shook with their gasps for breath, his hanging arms trembled convulsively, whilst his hands were white and rigid, and their nails blue ; it was terrible even to look at him. I came up to him, however, and caught him by the shoulders ; he was moving fast and aimlessly, bent forwards as if he must fall directly ; he seemed scarcely conscious then.

“ Have you seen a ghost ? ” I asked, shaking him. “ What is the matter with you now ? ”

“ My—my—father.”

The words brought the relief of sobbing, but he trembled now again so much that he could scarcely stand. I sat down on the form against the mantelpiece, and drew him down to my side; I was obliged to put my arm round him to keep him upright at all; he was trembling so much. In another instant he was crying bitterly with his head against my shoulder.

"There, there, boy," said I, "don't trouble yourself like this. Is it anything that can be helped now?"

For I felt this was no terror for himself.

"My father—dead—the river," he cried, trembling.

I gave a little start myself.

"Like son, like father," I thought, but I said nothing.

He leant shuddering against me.

"They made me see him," he muttered at last. "They said—I must say—if it was him. He was on the bank; they were round him; he had cut his throat first. Oh!"—the shuddering seemed to shake every bone in his body as he spoke—"the doctor said it

—he was dead. Oh, I must go to my mother.”

“Does your mother know? Have they gone to tell her?” I asked in a low voice, as he leant against me.

“Oh yes—yes.”

“Wait you a bit then, lad.”

I took him up in my arms, for he could not have stood on his feet, carried him downstairs to an old cupboard, from which I made bold to steal some of my landlady’s brandy, moistened his lips with that, and found some water in a jug for him to drink. Then I told him he must rest a little, and after that he should go to his mother. He could walk a little now, clinging to me, so we got upstairs again; then I sat down once more on the form, and he leant, exhausted, against me, with his head on my shoulder and my arm round him. A footstep made him start, but he fell back again immediately.

It was the little doctor of the neighbourhood, a man round as a ball, with a round head and beard, but with a steady keenness in his eyes notwithstanding. He stood look-

ing at us as the boy clung to me, wondering, no doubt, at that, for he knew me well.

"Well, Mr. Mason," said he, pulling at his beard, "you have heard, I see."

"Can anything be done?" I asked.

"No."

Arce shuddered convulsively at the voices, but tried hard to keep still.

"More than enough has been done already," I said. "What! had they not witnesses enough all over the town that they must kill with the shock a delicate lad like this? And now, have they told the mother at all?"

"Oh, I must go to my mother!" cried he, starting up, but I pulled him down on to my breast again.

"Lie still," I said, "and you shall go to your mother then."

He did lie still for about five minutes with his head on my shoulder till his breath came quietly once more, whilst the doctor stood looking at us both. Then he rose, very pale, but quite composed, and took his hat to go.

"Shall I come with you?" I asked.

"No; I would like to be alone."

"I will come to you in the evening," I said, and he went.

The doctor still stood looking at me for a minute, then went also without a word, and I was left to think.

That evening I went to Pleasant Place again. The door of the Daltons' house was wide open, and their maid, with her arms akimbo, was talking to a crowd of neighbours. I forced my way through these. In the passage the little girl and boy were playing together on the floor. Farther on a glimmer below a door showed where a light was burning. I went in there without knocking, and closed the door behind me.

The room was clean, swept, washed, and still as death. I had never seen the place in order before. One tallow candle burnt on the table. The shutters of the window were closed. The body lay, covered by a sheet, on a sort of sofa in the corner; and there in the centre of the floor, on a torn bit of carpet, sat Mrs. Dalton, with Arce clinging

to her, like the two last survivors after a shipwreck.

It was long past midnight before I could get to my lodgings again. The fire was out, and all looked dreary there as I went alone to bed. Even there I could not sleep.

I had done what I could, and given what comfort was possible to me, but there was very little to say. The poor widow (scarcely even that) was quite quiet, though very pale and desolate. Only once had she spoken passionately during all the hours I was with her; that was when I first came in and she rose up to meet me.

"Oh, Mr. Mason," she cried, then clasping her hands, "you told me truth when you was here; the help of God would have been better for him than mine."

Then she had got me a chair, and sent her son away to the children. We sat and talked for hours. Before I went she showed me the dead body—the poor always do that—and then I left her.

It was agreed between us that Andrew should come back to me after the funeral was

over. She did not seem to need him, or to need money—alas! the one cause that had devoured her earnings was gone now—and I told her that my teaching could be of service to him yet. I told her, too, for the first time, all I thought of his talent, and of all my hopes for him, but she did not seem to pay much attention then. He was to stay with me till December—my year—then to return to her whilst I made arrangements for his journey to London. She agreed patiently to everything.

One question I ventured to ask, though I was almost afraid to do so.

“You have written to your eldest son?”

“Yes, sir; I don’t think he’ll come.”

“Do you ever hear from your second son?”

“No.”

“Ah! But you have the little ones?”

“Yes.”

But the assent had in it hardly more of life than the negative.

She went upstairs, though, and fetched them down, and they kissed me. They were

pretty children, the boy dark, the little girl fair and quite lovely.

“Poor papa—papa so badly,” she lisped to me.

Then they went upstairs to their brother, who kept with the baby. I saw the dead body, as I have said, and then went.

All that night I lay awake, making plans for my pupil—that seemed natural to me now—but I had a sore, heavy heart notwithstanding: I could scarcely hope even for him. Mrs. Dalton’s desolate face, that other face I had seen, and the unconscious children, were like weights on my brain to me; it seemed as if more trouble might be coming. I got up in the morning before it was light and wrote to the artists again. After that the days passed much as usual.

Arce came back on the night of the funeral. It had rained all day. I sat waiting for him as on that other time before our year began. It was a slow, light footstep I heard at last on the stairs. He came in quietly, looking chilled to the very bones, though he was not wet; he had been wet through when he was

standing out (*i.e.*, at the funeral), he said, and he had never been warm since. I made him sit down by the fire till bedtime; then we went into the other room together.

I sat down on my bed, too tired even to undress, for I had been having some ill times lately. He stood still in the midst of the room, his lips quirking as if he were thinking, and his face white. I could not tell what moved him. Every minute I expected him to kneel down, for since the weather grew cold I had made him say his prayers first; but he would not. All at once he turned away as if resolved, and began to take off his jacket, but I was watching.

“Arce,” said I, “you have not said your prayer to night.”

“No.”

“Do you not mean to?”

“I can’t—can’t,” he said, with a wild sob, and all at once I remembered under what circumstances he had heard his prayer that day.

That checked me. There was a moment’s silence whilst the rain beat on the window.

He stood still in the midst of the room, fumbling at his jacket buttons, but with a face so white, so wretched, it was not possible to look at it without some desire to help. A sudden impulse seized me.

“Do you want to be taught how to say your prayers, lad?” said I. “Come, then, and say the Lord’s Prayer at my knees, as if you were telling it to your mother.”

I had not thought he would obey me, but he did. He came at once and knelt down before me, laid his clasped hands on my knee, and let his face rest upon them whilst he spoke. Not a word passed between us after he had risen once more; we lay down at last in silence.

But I lay long awake weeping in the darkness that night. Somehow the young voice had moved me, the young face that had been so close to me then. A sort of yearning had come to me; if only I could have had a son of my own to grow up by me! And once more the face of years ago was with me then—with other thoughts; if I had had more courage, or less, perhaps, I need not so

have lived all my life alone. Too late now ! I could ask none to share the sickness of my broken life with me. I got to sleep at last.

The next night—we had not spoken on the subject meanwhile—I sat down on my bed, as if accidentally, once more, and he came to me at once. From that time he always said the Lord's Prayer in that manner to me.

Ah, well ! The days passed on, and I made many arrangements for him. I used to say to myself in my surly way that it was well for me to take all that trouble ; he would be far enough from all thought of me before the winter was done. Indeed, he was far from me before the winter was over.

CHAPTER XV.

YET it all came slowly. I do not know when I first began to fear; perhaps I had always feared since I had known him.

The autumn was cold and wet; streets, trees, all were dripping always with rain; the chill, damp wind seemed to penetrate our old house; even within there was no escaping from it. Arce was not well; the cold that had been hanging about him before the funeral seemed to fasten on him now; he was never warm, and a dull pain in his side seemed almost to disable him at times. Yet I was not much afraid; it seemed so impossible that after two such exposures he should not be ill; I had expected him to be worse than that. Only I wished still that the winter were over. I fancy that the neighbours who saw him at intervals knew the change in him before it came to me.

He worked now harder than ever. I had told him that his time with me was short,

and he seemed determined to do all he could. Sometimes that almost alarmed me; his brain and hands were feverishly active; even physical illness had no power to stop him now, and when he had begun a picture he seemed afraid to delay the completion of it. Also, whenever he was not painting, he would study with all his might; I borrowed books on all sorts of subjects connected with art for him. His intellect developed wonderfully; I was almost afraid, for it seemed to me he must suffer afterwards for what seemed unnatural precocity now. Still I would not check him, only I gave him as little housework as possible, always rising early in the mornings myself, and contenting myself with the knowledge that he was always there, and ready when his help was needed. He could help me in so many ways; I did not like to think what would happen to me when he was gone.

Meanwhile there was another vexation. The rich tradesmen had patronised someone else, and all hope of his assistance was lost. The old picture-dealer, however, retained all

his admiration for my young artist, and declared he could dispose of a set of flower-paintings with the help of some exhibition in the spring. I set Arce, therefore, to work on finishing several of these, not that it was the kind of work I wanted him to do, but that I knew it was well for him to learn betimes that he must earn money whenever such earning was possible. In the evenings he amused himself with fairies and goblins as before.

On Sundays we rested. I had always been used to paint then, but since the day of the Topsy Preacher I read the newspaper and slept instead, whilst Arce, obeying a hint I gave him once stole out willingly enough to church. One evening I entered a church myself after a walk, and saw him on one of the free seats, sitting upright, his black, hungry eyes fixed on the preacher with an expression in them I have never forgotten, though I do not remember the sermon. I joined him afterwards, but we did not speak on the subject. That was the last time he was able to enter a church at all.

There is one thing still I have forgotten.

Earlier in the autumn I was away for two days. When I came back my landlady told me he had taken advantage of that to be out twice in the country, disobediently, for I never allowed him to be away in the evenings at all. He told me, however, in an imploring manner, that he could not help it; he had wanted so much to finish a picture of a sunset he had begun in the holidays.

"Was it done yet?" I asked.

"Very nearly," he said, but he seemed frightened lest I should wish to see it, and I did not speak of the subject again.

Well, I must get to the end now.

On Monday he seemed much as usual. On Tuesday for the first time I began to feel anxious; his eyes were large and bright, there was a look of fever about him, and he coughed often. When I joined him at dinner-time he was very pale, and shook as if with cold. I made him draw his chair near the fire, and then—with an impulse of which I am still ashamed—I moved my own farther away, for we had never yet eaten our meal together side by side. He got up then

all at once, crying violently, and left the room. I was sorry, but there was no help for it, and I had to go to my pupils, for they came and went early now. When—the afternoon over—I came back to my room at last, he was sitting crouching over the fire, and I saw that he had not done much painting that day.

“Was anything the matter?” I asked.

“No—only he felt so curious.”

Then he left the room. I waited some while, then, hearing him cough, I went to him.

He was in the bedroom, leaning against the wall, pale as death, and covered with blood. He had broken a blood-vessel. I took him in my arms, laid him on the bed, and sent the servant for the doctor and his mother at once.

That night we thought he would die, but by the morning he had rallied; and as days went on his strength seemed to return to him.

There came a letter to me asking on what day he should start for London, I would not

answer it, for I waited first to hear the decision of the doctor. And yet I dared not ask yet for that decision, for each day seemed to bring me more hope, and I thought if only I waited long enough, these hopes might in some measure be confirmed at last, so I lingered and hesitated till it came to me.

Meanwhile Mrs. Dalton stayed by her son all day, and I went in and out and did my work as usual, with a sore terror in my heart. I could have my meals alone now. Sunday came round again at last.

We were alone together on the Sunday afternoon, Arce and I. Mrs. Dalton could keep away from her family no longer and was gone. I was glad, for I preferred to be alone with him. It was a bright day, I had pulled down the old white blind, that the glitter of the frost and snow might not come in too keenly; he lay quite quiet, half-dosing from weakness, whilst I sat idle by his side.

Everything about him was clean and neat, Mrs. Dalton had seen to that; his hair and eyelashes looked oddly black against the whiteness, but his face had scarcely more colour

than the pillow on which it rested. Still he was breathing quietly, and I was glad.

All at once there came a sound below, and a voice, I knew the doctor had come. He still lay quiet. My heart began beating very fast, but I had made up my mind before, and went out at once.

“Ah! you wish me to give you my opinion of him to-day?” said the little round doctor as he stood by me on the stairs.

“I must write to London,” said I.

“Yes, ah! is he strong enough to talk to me?”

“I think so.”

“Mother here?”

“No.”

“That’s well; I will go upstairs to him now.”

He went up accordingly, and I followed, my heart beating hard against my side for wretchedness. Yet for the first few minutes there seemed no cause for fear.

Arce was awake, and had raised himself a little on his pillows. His face was very white, but that seemed less terrible now the dark

liquid brightness of his eyes could be seen, they had grown clear and soft since his illness had begun. He looked up now with a sort of smile, the doctor sat down on the floor by his mattress at once. I sat on my bed and listened.

"Hey—much better to-day?"

"Yes, a little."

"That's well—so, let's feel your pulse—*that's* stronger. You will soon be up again now."

"Soon be up?"

He looked at the doctor with a hard, wistful glance, one I knew well, and the other returned it with earnestness and some surprise, wishing perhaps to penetrate as far as might be through the poor lad's reserve. But that was no easy task.

"Yes—why, how old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Sixteen—quite young—you ought soon to be strong again now. When I was a school-boy, nothing kept me on a sick-bed for long. And now tell me, are you strong enough to talk to me?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me how it all came about, you know—on that morning—let's see."

He asked some questions; Arce gave answers; and I listened.

"Well, I understand that, and now, had you been feeling ill before that day, you know?"

Arce hesitated and coloured.

"You had?"

"Yes."

"And how?"

"My cough used to hurt me so."

"Ah! anything else?"

"My head burnt so, sometimes, and I had such a pain here, and here," he touched his breast and his side.

"Always?"

"I forgot, sometimes, when I painted."

"Ah! was there anything else?"

"I was so—so cold—I could never be warm."

"Ah! and now tell me, was there any reason for all this?"

Once more the boy was silent.

"You had felt this for some time?"

"Yes."

"How did it all begin? tell me."

Again he was silent, looking at me who sat looking downwards, silent too.

"I got—so wet—twice," he faltered, whilst a deep flush quite changed his face.

"Twice—how was that?"

"Once—the last time—when I was out"—
And he stopped.

"At his father's funeral," said I, and the doctor changed the subject at once.

"Ah! and the first time?"

He hesitated, faltered, looked with imploring eyes at me, then turned an almost frightened glance to the doctor again. I sat silent, wishing with all my heart he would tell a falsehood now. But perhaps my presence saved him from that.

"I got in the water," he said.

"In the water?"

Arce was silent, but his agitation was so visible I felt forced to come to his assistance now.

"We had a dispute that night," said I,

speaking sharply and quickly, "that is, I hurt one of his pictures, and that hurt him, he ran home and his father beat him, and so"—

"And so you got in the water?" said the doctor, bending over him, "that was a foolish thing to do, my boy, wasn't it?"

Arce was silent.

"And how did you get out again?"

"Mr. Mason pulled me out!" he said with eagerness.

"And you have been ill since?"

"Yes—not so bad—till the funeral."

"When I was your age I thought nothing of a ducking or two."

Arce gave no reply. He lay silent, his eyes seeming to question, but the doctor was long used to such scrutiny.

"Well, boy," he said at last, "you are much stronger to-day, you hardly need me to tell you that, and you will be up again in a day or two. Only you must take care of yourself—you will, won't you?"

"Yes, yes. When shall I be up?"

"We will see to-morrow. And now, take

your medicine, and sleep. Hey, you shrink at that. Don't you like your medicine ? ”

“ It hurts me so to take it.”

Indeed his weakness made the smallest action painful to him. But I stepped forward, and, the doctor giving place to me, sat down by his mattress and poured the stuff down his throat as I was accustomed to do. Then I arranged his pillow and told him to sleep. He closed his eyes obediently, and we left the room.

Not one word did we say till we had gone down the steps and stood in my sitting-room together. I had shut the door, we stood by the fireplace. I saw he was going to speak. For one instant my heart scarcely seemed to beat, then the words came.

“ Of course,” he said, “ you never expected him to live.”

My knees trembled, I dropped down into my chair, and was silent. The words came at last, after a long interval.

“ You said he was better.”

“ He is better.”

Silence.

"He has rallied wonderfully—I did not expect it of him ; it is his death-blow all the same. You—you are concerned about him?"

"Yes—how long?"

"A few months perhaps."

"And there is no chance?"

"None."

I sat silent, letting it close round me.

"He has no constitution," went on the doctor, reflecting quietly. "I never supposed he would live to be a man. His life has been hanging on a thread for many years now. I attended him once when he was a boy ; I felt he would hardly get to manhood then."

He spoke gravely, with his hand on his hip and his shoulder against the mantelpiece.

But I broke out desperately, with a savage fierceness such as that with which a man vainly tries to fling off an inevitable nightmare.

"Do something. Tell me something—London—abroad—can nothing be done?"

"Nothing."

"But he is better."

"He has revived once. He will not revive again."

And I sat silent once more.

"This is—because of the water?" I asked, raising my head at last.

"That or what came after, it does not matter now."

And I was silent again. My little painting table was near, I bent my elbows on that, and my head on my hands.

"Is it—all my fault?" I asked.

"Your fault?" echoed the doctor with a scorn I could not understand, and went on with his directions.

When he had done, he took up his hat and gloves and moved towards the door; then suddenly looking at me, he came back, stood in front of me and spoke with vehemence now.

"I think God in heaven, Mr. Mason," he said, "will not forget all you have done for that poor boy. I never, in all my life, saw in any human creature such a change as in him after he came to you. No one can forget it here, and I think the Lord will not forget it either."

He grasped my hand; I pulled it away and rose.

"You do not know what you are talking

about," said I hoarsely and quickly, "it is all nonsense what you say. I did not like him, he hurt me, and I wanted to punish him for it. I have never been good to him since he lived with me; if I ever did anything for him at all, it was only because I knew his power, and I thought he might live to paint some great picture, and I might say it was I who taught him."

The doctor looked at me for an instant as if puzzled, then took my hand once more.

"Ah, well," he said, "the feeling was natural enough, yet a human soul is worth more than a picture, any day."

He pressed my hand and went. And I stood thinking. More than a picture—more—than other things—perhaps— I checked myself, thought once more of my Psyche, then went upstairs to him.

He was sleeping, his white face against the pillow, his breath, so laboured often, coming quietly now. I stood bending over him, a strange yearning to speak to him was in my heart, but I could not disturb him then.

CHAPTER XVI.

WELL, let me get to the end.

He slept on more or less till late on Monday morning, and seemed much stronger and better when at last he woke. In the evening he was able to rise, and I carried him into the next room, where he sat in my chair by the fire watching me whilst I painted.

The next day I arranged his easel by him, and he was able to add a few touches to his flower-pictures then, though his hand and eyes were too weak to bear to work for more than a few minutes at a time. He spent so his last days with me, sitting in my chair and painting when he could, from morning till night. Sometimes I almost dared to hope, yet his difficulty in breathing alarmed me always; and though he was stronger, a terrible amount of weakness still remained. I had written to my friends in London to tell them of his illness, promising to write again

when another month had passed. His year with me would be over in a few days now, and then he was to return to his mother; he seemed to have a great longing for that, and I, knowing him so ill, felt that it would be a relief to me to feel him restored to her care at last. Meanwhile I nursed him as I could.

The neighbourhood, always very interested in our affairs, began to know something about the matter now, and displayed more feeling than I could have expected from it. No one now made remarks on "Mason and his Donkey" as I walked the streets, a little portrait of me on the wall, holding a fat ass by a halter, was partly erased. Those who came in and out, seeing him wan and pale by the fire, gave him no more of their old glances now. Only one rough man had a word to say.

"You nurse devils, Mr. Mason," pointing with his thumb whilst he spoke.

"Well," said I, "you're none too much of an angel yourself."

Arce must have heard, but he did not seem

to attend to the conversation. Afterwards, as I have said, there were many stories amongst the people of my cruelty to him, but these were of later growth.

During the early part of the week he was much better. On Thursday he was very ill, coughing up blood, and in such pain of body that moving or breathing even seemed to torture him, yet he tried to paint still. After that he revived, looked almost like himself again, breathed freely, and did little duties of painting or house work very slowly and quietly, but without apparent difficulty, and with much pleasure. I could not help wondering often what he thought of himself, but I dared not speak to him, and hoped his increasing weakness would bring its own lesson. For indeed now, in spite of occasional wild hopes, I could not deceive myself—he did not look better—the dark hollows round his eyes never changed, and I told myself that the shadow of death lay there. Will you believe that during those days my old repulsion to him did not change either? That is true, though it is terrible ; it fought and struggled

within me in those last times, and I could not be tender with him.

On Saturday evening he seemed much pleased; he had finished, he said, a painting he had begun long ago at last. But he did not tell me what it was. I gathered together all his flower pictures then—he had put the last delicate touches to them that morning—and arranged them on the table.

“Now, lad,” said I, “these are finished at last, and you can rest in your mind on Sunday.” For on Monday he was to leave me. “These may be worth some money to you; you had better leave them for the present with me.”

“Are they—worth—money, Mr. Mason?” he asked, looking up, whilst his colour came and went like a girl’s.

“Certainly,” said I.

He laughed softly, and said no more.

We had a quiet, pleasant Sunday. I borrowed my landlady’s Bible (for I had none) and read out of the Gospels the accounts of the Crucifixion to him. But neither of us spoke of our separation, close though that

was to us now. He was very quiet; I thought sometimes to myself that one could scarcely know less of his feelings if the gates of the very silence itself had closed upon him. And what I felt myself I hardly knew, I was stunned and miserable. The evening came at last.

We entered our room together—the room that we were to share together no longer. No good-night passed between us, we had never been accustomed to that. Nor did we speak of our parting. Still he stood looking on the ground as if he had something to say; at last he spoke—

“Mr. Mason, may I kneel to my prayer to night?”

“Certainly, if you like,” I said.

“May I—say it different?”

“If you like,” I answered, surprised, and sat down on my bed. He came then, knelt before me, and laid his arms on my knees. That was a trying moment, the feeling of the touch of them again, the knowledge that this was the end. I had suddenly to press my own arms on my breast to keep myself from

sobbing. He too seemed absorbed, and was silent for a while. The words that came slowly at last were not those that I had expected—

“ ‘ Man that is born of a woman has but a short time to live, and is full of misery ’ . . .
“ ‘ Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.’ ”

Again he waited—then repeated the Lord’s Prayer. Then when at last he paused he laid his head down on my knees and remained quiet in a long agony of silent weeping—noiseless tears that yet came and continued as if he would weep his very heart away. I could not disturb him. I liked, too, to feel the young face on my knees, yet I put down my hands and raised it last.

“ There, there, lad,” said I, “ you have cried enough, get to sleep now.”

I still held his face in my hands ; for one instant there came over me the desire to kiss him, but I did not. I undressed him and laid him in bed. Then I got to my own, but it was long before I slept that night.

The next day passed quietly. Arce was very still, though his eyelids looked hot and purple, and he had scarcely slept. He would insist on doing some little household tasks for me. When the last moment arrived, and the hired carriage appeared with his mother in it (sent by the curate, though Rover had been long away) he clung to my arm, keeping tight hold of it whilst he took up his bundle, and clinging so closely to it with both hands whilst we went downstairs that his head almost rested against me then. Even when we got to the end of them he would not leave go of me. I had to release myself from him at last. Still holding his shoulder, I looked at him.

"You will come and see me if you can, lad?" said I.

"Oh, yes, yes."

"I will keep your pictures for a bit. You will remember what I read to you on Sunday?"

"Yes, yes."

Again I felt a desire to kiss him and could not. I put him into the carriage. It drove slowly away, and I went upstairs. I could not tell you my desolateness then.

The next day passed without tidings, the next, the next. Then all at once, as I was teaching in the afternoon, I heard his name. An awestruck whisper seemed to go round the class. I could not bear it and spoke.

"Have you heard of Dalton?"

"Yes, sir."

"How is he?"

"Dying, sir."

It was the answer I had expected, but it was not less terrible for that. I sank into the nearest seat and sat motionless. Only when the class rose at last could I rise too.

"Boys," I said, "he drew better than any of you."

Then I went to my own room, too dull and faint to be capable of further movement then.

A message came from Mrs. Dalton that night. Her son could not live more than a day or two, would I come now to him? The next day, after my morning teaching, I went to Pleasant Place to see him once more.

CHAPTER XVII.

How shall I tell it all to you now ?

Mrs. Dalton received me, her eyes swollen with crying—they had been dry for her husband. She took me into the room and talked, whilst her baby clung to her, and the little boy played with marbles on the floor.

He had been taken worse, she said, the same evening on which he had come. The doctor had been o' Tuesday, again to-day, he said to-day it was no good—and Jim had come yestere'en and Bob—she hadn't seen Bob for a long while, but she didn't seem to care now.

“Does he—know how ill he is ?”

“I can't say, sir.”

“Does he not speak then ?”

“He can't speak, sir. He lies and tries to breathe.”

I shuddered and was silent.

“And I told him, yester eve, sir, as you was comin', and he's lain and looked at the

door ever since. He's never took his eyes off the door night nor morn since I told him that."

A sharp pang went through my heart as I thought that I had let *anything* keep me from him.

"Take me to him," I said.

"We're all in scrummage (confusion), sir," she said, "you won't mind that?"

"No, no," said I, and we went upstairs together.

She was very quiet, this woman who had known so many sorrows, but it was terrible to me.

* * * * *

Years afterwards, on that grey evening when I dropped on the snow in London, it was this scene that was before my eyes. A little room in the roof, a window in the roof, one white bed almost filling all the space there was, two young men in a corner whispering with each other, and the lovely little girl with her fair curls on her shoulders playing with her bare feet on the very bed in which the sick boy lay.

His panting, laboured breath made all the noise in the room—the window had been left open to help that, and the winter air came in with the afternoon sunlight.

He was very much changed, terribly changed even in the few days since I had seen him last, the death-struggle had wasted his face, and left it pale and damp, with blue, lifeless lips that still could tremble with the struggling breath; he seemed almost in a stupor of weakness. Yet his face was towards the door, and as I came in the dark eyes brightened once more.

Then as I stood silent and looking at him, at him so changed, so worn, soon to be so far from me now, so far advanced already in that last dark journey that we could not share with him, it all came over me at once. The young life that had been near me, the rooms he had dusted, the help he had been to me, the talent I had loved to train—all these were there, with me, not quite ended yet, for the dying glance could turn towards me still. It all came at once, and with him lying there before me, I could fight no longer with it now.

"Mrs. Dalton," said I with great difficulty and in a whisper, "tell your sons to leave the room," she obeyed at once and they went, glancing suspiciously at me—the second, the ill-conditioned one, taking out the little girl in his arms, their footsteps sounding on the stairs.

I came then and sat down by the bed, leaning on the pillow, so that the dark, dying glance and mine might meet. How wasted with that last struggle the young face was that was so close to me—but I must speak now.

"Do you know me, lad?" I asked.

His eyes tried to smile at mine, but he could not speak.

"I have come to see you. There is something I must say to you now."

Still silence, but he looked at me. The impulse was on me and the words came.

"Arce," said I bending over him (at that moment I could only call him by the old familiar title), "there is one thing I must say to you before I go. You have been a good lad to me; through all this year you

have lived with me, and have helped me, more than I could have thought possible from any one, and have been good. I want to tell you that I care for you ; I do like you, more than the others, than my old friends—more than my Psyche—I wanted you to live and paint, but the Lord knows what is best, and we don't, that's all."

There had been a struggle for me even then.

"I have been often hard and unkind to you, lad," my voice almost broke here, "but you'll forgive me now, won't you? Because maybe, we shan't meet on earth again, you know. Kiss me."

I bent down to the cold lips, and then there was silence.

But now, all at once, as I raised my head, there came over him the desire to speak. I saw it in the sudden flush on his face, in the moving lips, in the effort to raise his head. Again and again his lips moved, but no sound came from them. He became distressed; it was very painful to see.

His mother bent down her head, and tried

in vain to hear. Then he became restless, moved uneasily, tried again and again to speak. I could not bear it at last, and putting Mrs. Dalton away, I took his hand and bent over him once more.

“Stop that, lad,” said I, “it will do no good to you. Whatever is troubling you, put it away from your mind and don’t vex yourself now. There are other things for you to think about, God and Heaven and the dear Lord who died on the cross for you and me; you do remember, don’t you?”

His glance brightened for a moment, and he pressed my hand faintly. Then the restless longing to speak came over him again. He signed to his mother to come to him and raise his head, the change of position seemed to make him easier; he leaned against her and the words came struggling at last. He still looked at me as he said them.

“I want—to give you—all my pictures.”

He fell back coughing, the next instant the lips that had spoken to me were stained with blood.

The doctor was on the stairs, the younger

brother had followed him, there was a bustle and confusion in the room. In that small space every presence seemed to exhaust the air, I went out therefore and went downstairs. There I waited alone a long while. The eldest Dalton came to me at last. His brother was quite unconscious, might yet live some hours, the doctor said. I begged to be sent for if he should revive again, then went quickly home and taught.

That night I sat up many hours waiting, but no message came.

The next evening I heard the rest. He had revived a little, but only to the consciousness of pain. Once they thought he had recognised his second brother, but they could not be sure. All night long the death-struggle had lasted; he had become easier in the morning, and at eleven o'clock had died.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“AND I’m sure, sir,” said Mrs. Dalton, “I can’t do it. My poor boy gave them to you, with his dying breath he gave them, and I can’t take ’em from you now.”

“Then you will let me pay you for them at least,” said I.

“Pay, sir, pay—for what he gave you then?”

She was resolute, and I was forced to submit at last.

So I have them still, the roses and the other flower-pictures, the drooping rushes, the studies of bones and casts, the chalk and charcoal studies, the landscapes, the pictures of fruits and pots, the paintings from the life, and the fairies and the goblins that he always drew in the evenings. There is no work he ever did with me, except those I made him destroy, that I have not now. I keep them with reverent care, only disturbing them to be sure they are not being hurt, or to show some artist whose

opinion I value what my young pupil could do. (I will tell you where they are, you can do what you will with them all when my time is gone). *Then*, I scarce knew whether to be grateful to Mrs. Dalton or not, it was all so painful to me.

But, that I might do what I could for her, I painted from memory the face I had known so well, the overhanging forehead, the thin sallow face, the dark eyes half-wild and half-appealing, and gave the portrait to her.

She was almost startled by it, but I did not think much of the resemblance myself.

One other sketch in pencil that she did not like I kept for myself, one done several months before, and representing only with few strokes the slight boy-figure, with the head bent, and the face almost turned away, as he used to look as he sat by the fire at night. I have that now.

He was buried in the dark, grimy cemetery just outside the town, with the chimneys of the foundries beyond it. I sent his mother

W

some money for a tombstone. She chose the inscription herself—only

ANDREW ARCET DALTON,

Died Dec.— 18—,

Aged Sixteen.

Underneath, when I went to visit it, some wit had scratched with a nail—

Their works do follow them.

Whoever wrote that was thinking, I am afraid, of the burnt stacks, or stolen loaves of which so many had heard. I read, and a different meaning rose for me. The delicate painting, the house-work he used to do so well for me, these then had not died for ever with him.

Ah, well, I did not see that tombstone till many years had gone. The day after his funeral I left L— for London. That morning also the Daltons went suddenly. I have never heard of them since.

And now, Jeanie, I have come to the end of my story, and it may occur to you to wonder why I should have written it at all. Wait then a moment and I will tell you that as well.

Seven years after the day on which I left L — I spent one day in it again. That was a holiday for me, strange, unexpected, and so bewildering that it has a dreamlike memory for me still. Those seven years had been spent in London, in illness, in desperate work, in the midst of the crowds and bustle of men—it seemed a strange rest to come back so to my old home once more.

White-haired, bent, altered myself, and in the midst of alterations, I walked through the streets. There were more chimneys, more houses, the streets had more people in them, a great church and a great theatre had been built. But down by the river, where I used to live, there was not so much difference, the backs of the foundries were black and dingy as ever, the old, tottering houses came down to the water's edge as they used to do; the bridges crossed the river, and the sunshine struck down green light into the dull green water.

It was a November day, but no snow had fallen yet that year. Amongst the people there were many changes; Rover was gone,

the curate was gone, my old pupils were scattered in all directions, only here and there amongst the older people, I found faces I used to know. So I went up and down, seeing all I could, till I reached my old lodgings at last.

Changed these, battered and bent like myself, almost falling now. No one cared to repair the damp and crumbling house—one old woman stayed in it to keep it in some sort of order in case it might yet be sold, and it was left to its ruin. By means of a small fee I easily obtained her permission—though she did not know me—to spend one evening in my old rooms; it seemed to me that I would like that, and she agreed to light a fire for me before I came. Then I went back to the inn, had my supper there, and started for my old resting place once more.

And now imagine me, Jeanie, sitting alone in my deserted sitting-room, the wind howling outside, the blinds down, within a waste of boards, the one chair I had borrowed, the unlit candle on the mantle-piece, and the fire-light. Alone—lonely—yet, after all, not

much more lonely than I used to be—I had spent so many evenings here—I leant my elbows on my knees and watched the flames, as I thought of my lonely years—of my Psyche—of one who for one year had sat opposite me as I sat here in the evenings by the firelight. That seemed so long ago—I was older, weaker now. After a while I knelt down and prayed; heathen though I still was in some things I had learnt more of prayer by this time. That comforted me; I could sit up then and look into the firelight again. Sitting there with my eyes on the flames and my back to the empty room, it seemed almost that I might be waiting there for him—his footstep; that he had gone out to get the paper in the evening, and that when he came back we should begin our work together. On turning away my head I could think that the boy-figure was close to me. Seven years ago—my heart cried out on the darkness and the silence to give back only one word from him. I could not bear it at last and got up to explore.

My old class-room was empty and desolate,

the Psyche's wooden pillar still in a corner of it, some names still remaining that the boys had scratched on the walls. The little room he had once had was damp and crumbling. The garden looked strange with the moonlight on it, the old tree cast a great shadow right across it; I stood there for a while and thought. It was bitterly cold. I came in and went to my old bedroom; my iron bedstead was still there, and a little old chest I had left. I took that back with me to examine by the firelight. Nothing valuable was likely to be in it, still I had a listless curiosity as I opened it, at any rate it would give me something to do. Within were some ragged coats of mine, as I had expected, folded and left as I had left them. But above, to my surprise, was a little brown paper parcel carefully tied up and wrapped. I could not remember having placed it there. It felt like a bit of stretched canvas. I took it up and opened it.

Jeanie, there is no need for me to describe to you too closely what I saw, for it is quite

familiar to you now, and besides I could not tell you all it was to me when I saw it then so suddenly for the first time.

There, before my eyes, was the pool I remembered so well, the little pool I had seen twice in intervals of recovery. The reeds dipped down into it, the rough banks stretched up from it, above on one side the bushes clustered dark and thick ; the sunset glow was in the sky, in the red floating clouds and in reflected glory in the water below. I sat and stared ; no need for me to ask whose hand had done this. Jeanie, it has many faults, yet I wonder over it now.

But at that moment you may be sure I could not be critical. Wonder and emotion almost overpowered me, I could scarce breathe for amazement. This then was the place I had loved—his work—the most beautiful work he had done—and he had done it for me. My eyes grew dim ; I had my message from the dead at last.

Then came other thoughts. When had he done it ? How ? In what manner ? Had

he really then remembered my careless words? and had this in very truth been painted for me? I began to get hungry for a message, for the mere sight of his handwriting or his signature—it was such a long while since I had seen it; and, yet, I dared not look. I fell to gloating over the picture, to the shadows in it, and the colours; to the dark mass of the bushes, and to the transparent glow of the light in the clouds and in the water. How had he been able to do as well as this? And then once more came the longing for a message. I searched the paper covering, the chest. In vain. Only when sick at heart I moved the picture to lay it back in its old place once more, did I catch sight of the letters written on the canvas behind it. Then, for one moment, my breath came fast and thick, so that I could not see; but only for a moment. I give his dying message as it was written to me. The first word on which my eyes fell had perplexed me, but the context rendered it clear—as my repentance now—

“TO MY DEAR MASTER,
“FROM A. A. DALTON,
“Dec.—18—”

(The date was that of the Monday on which he left me—less than a week before his death. Then came the rest—the delicate, irregular handwriting had trembled, but I could read it still)—

“If I live and get well I mean to work hard and save all my money to buy another Sikie. It will not be the old Sikie, but it will be all I can do. If I do not get well I hope you will take this because it is all I have, and I have taken such pains with it.”

Beneath that again, in letters more crooked and trembling—they must have been added as an after-thought—the last few words—

“I am very sorry.”

The canvas dropped from my hands, I covered my face with them and fell to weeping.

So—it was ended now—so—the last word

had been spoken till the opening Gates of Eternity should set us face to face with each other again—So *he* was sorry—the lad who had lived with me for a year, who had given me such faithful service as I had never even imagined till then, watching my glances, hanging on my words, counting nothing too much or too little that he could do for me. Oh, I had done much for him—I had saved him perhaps—yet, even so—viewed in that light of eternity—which of us two was the debtor now?

And I had not thought so—had never known it—had fancied, even at that last moment, that the greater need for forgiveness lay with him. What had my Psyche ever given to me? Comfort—help!—one thing yet lay beyond that she could not give, the human eyes that could look into mine and love me.

Cold, hard, unforgiving, solitary, and proud of my solitude, cut off so in my stupidity from God and man—I knew myself now. The outcast had taught me. Once more I

dropped on my knees, but for a long time no prayer would come, only some old words that went beating through my brain as I thought of my life and his, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." I seemed to know their meaning now.

Well, I have only a few more words to say.

I had his picture framed, as you know, and through all the chequered life that followed I kept it always, only parting with it once, because in my desolation then I thought it best to have it in safer hands than mine. And I have it now. Before I sent it to be framed I fastened behind it a piece of rough folded flannel, partly to protect it from damp, but partly also that I might be sure my poor boy's dying message should reach no eyes but mine. Then when it came back it seemed to me that I should like to write something on it in memory of him. For a long time I

thought, but only a few words would come at last—they are on the back of the frame now—

“JOHN MASON,
“From His Best Pupil.”

THE END.

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